

The background of the slide features two globes. One globe is in the foreground, showing a detailed map of the world with various colors and text. The second globe is positioned behind it, slightly to the left and higher up, and is out of focus. The lighting is dramatic, with the globes appearing to glow against a dark, almost black background.

Final conference for the MOBILITY project | 20.04.2023

# Characteristics of Norwegian policy for international student mobility

Mari Elken

**NIFU**

## The roots of policies for international student mobility

- Until 1970s, mostly about sending students abroad due to capacity limited/lacking domestic capacity,
- Since WWII, a tradition for providing developmental help where education was an important component





## Establishment and consolidation of policy interest

- 1991: White Paper College reform
  - A whole chapter on internationalisation, also beyond mobility
- 1996: White Paper on study abroad
  - focus on increasing number of exchange students
  - how to shape student choice? Expand scholarships for exchange
- 2003: Quality reform
  - Stronger institutional responsibility
  - Quality and internationalisation intertwined
- 2009: White Paper on Internationalisation of education
  - Not all mobility is equal, more strategic thinking to emphasise quality and relevance
- 2016 White Paper on Quality culture
  - Continued quality emphasis, outwards focus





## Further consolidation and an unexpected change

- 2020 White Paper: A world of opportunities
  - Business as usual – half of the students should be mobile
  - Development of a policy to attract students as they provide a positive contribution to the economy
  - no tuition fees explicitly noted
- 2022: The entirely unexpected and rapid/rushed introduction of tuition fees to non-EEA students



## Key conditions / instruments

- Policy attention: Active ministry + agency
- Funding: State Education Loan Fund (Lånekassen)
- Nordic and European exchange programmes and agreements



## **Three important characteristics of Norwegian policies for international student mobility**

- 1.** Actor involvement: strong role of the ministry and agencies, but also strong consensus orientation (until autumn 2022)
- 2.** More strategic and formalised focus
- 3.** 'Positive' and taken for granted policy theme (until 2022), but sometimes ambiguous relationship between problems and solutions

## Networked nature of policymaking

- Many emphasise the role of the ministry and public agencies
  - *«we always write something about internationalisation when we write about higher education, because we think it is important. All the governments think it is important»*
- Institutions and students as well, but assessments of their relative role vary



## Mode: consensus-orientation and ownership

### ● Consensus-orientation

- *“There's no point in contributing to a policy that nobody wants, because then you divert attention from perhaps other important political issues.”*
- *“There is **great consensus** about that. That international student mobility is important for the individual and for society. That it is competence that we need.”*

### ● Work to achieve ownership within the sector

- *“From our side, we were very concerned that there should be a White Paper that, when it came, **there should not be many surprises for the sector**. It should be that institutions and students would be recipients of something that **they recognize and feel that this is something that we have proposed** as important themes.”*



## About fees, again

Break both in terms of content, but also in terms of process:

- The content of the policy (introduction of fees, no scholarships, poorly legitimised and argued)
- The manner in which the policy is introduced (hasty introduction and an unprepared sector, no risk assessment, no knowledge base, definitely no consensus..)



## 'Positive' policy

- Relationship to quality usually the expressed argumentation
  - But various policy rationales at play
  - While no simplistic assumptions, a strong belief about the relationship between international student mobility and quality
  - But is quality the input or output, and what are really the conditions for quality enhancement?
- More critical issues receive less attention, some gaps and tensions in policy priorities



## Examples of some gaps and tensions

### ● Strategic considerations:

- Is all outward mobility desirable, should all get equal degree of funding?
- *«After WWII, it is deeply ingrained in our knowledge and way of thinking that Norwegian students should be able to go abroad and obtain a full degree, it is impossible to change this.»*

### ● More fundamental changes rather than adjustments in Lånekassen

- Everyone knows it is the most important instrument, but also something one does not necessarily really think about, a bit “holy”

### ● Different priorities in foreign policy and educational policy

- E.g. in programme funding and how that plays out for implementation

### ● Skilled migration for a long time a no-area

- *"So some argue we should consider more actively what we do when they are finished. It's something that is clearly outside the Ministry of Education's area of responsibility. But it is the Ministry of Education that brings the students here. The regulations may not be completely aligned, immigration regulations, employment regulations, etc. So we have perhaps not been active enough in addressing this issue."*



## More strategic and formalised cooperation over time

- Integrated with processes of professionalisation of leadership and administrative staff
  - *“Twenty years ago, I believe that internationalization and student mobility were something **hidden away** in a corner of an institution. It was a specific group of people who were involved with it. But I think that **over the years, it has gained more and more attention, and it has been increasingly incorporated into strategies, raised up to the leadership of institutions.**”*



## Expectations of effects beyond the individual

*“The aspect of quality, quality improvement, has become much clearer in my opinion. And when it comes to, for example, international cooperation, **the institutional perspective** is much more prominent, we should have this focus on **quality, reciprocity, relevance**. In other words, these three aspects should be the foundation for everything. Instead of student mobility being something for the individual student, **the benefit that the individual student gains from moving from one institution to another on a personal level, it should also be something that changes an institution.**”*



## Challenges

- Security issues (e.g. China, Russia and Iran)
- North-South – capacity building and aid
- Sustainability issues, climate change and constraints on travel
- The pandemic and changing habits of students and staff
- How to mitigate the negative consequences of tuition fee introduction?



## Collaboration and values in the world of international student mobility

- Degree mobility in a new geopolitical situation
- Democratic values and the idea of an open society in conflict with economic needs that have emphasised strategic partnerships with authoritarian regimes



## Concluding remarks

- Norwegian policy for international student mobility has always been a relatively isolated matter, often with rather unclear goals ('positive but sometimes surface level policy')
  - This unclarity has prevailed in both pre- and post-tuition fees
- Disparities in terms of policy attention: full degree vs exchange, incoming vs outgoing
  - Recent trends suggest a shift towards more inward oriented approaches





## Concluding remarks (2)

- Taken-for-grantedness does not mean resilience, as indicated by the tuition fee discussions
  - When windows of opportunities emerge, radical change can happen rapidly, also of the undesirable kind
  - Need to work with maintaining practices that matter.
- Work with international student mobility requires careful thought about the purposes, practices and desired outcomes – and expression of those!
  - What kind of mobility, for whom and for what?



mari.elken@nifu.no  
www.nifu.no

---

**NIFU**