



**To: NSU and StL Internasjonl Komitee**

**From: International Students' Union of Norway (ISU)**

**Date: March 20, 2010**

**Subject:**

**ISU POLITICAL AGENDA AND PRIORITIES (2009-2010)**

- *'Sustainable internationalisation'*
- Quota scheme program funding while on exchange
- Expulsion of international students based on nationality and study subject

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## **Student explosion and *sustainable internationalisation***

Norway's involvement in, and firm commitment towards, a number of political processes has been implemented during the last decade in such a way as to result in an undeniable rise in the number of foreign students who chose Norway as educational destination<sup>1</sup>.

Such increase, which is mainly attributed to short-term studying (3 to 12 months)<sup>2</sup>, boosted unexpectedly the need for (and thus, Higher Institutions' and Samskipnaden's obligations towards) supplying study programs, accommodation and language courses *towards a continuously renewable (and steadily increasing) international student body*, without **prioritising on quality when focusing on internationalisation of education**.

At the same time, due to the above reason(s), Norwegian society and international students have not been provided with a fair chance of time in order to allow a reciprocally beneficial approach and exchange of cultures, resulting, thus, in poor integration of the latter -not only academically, but also socially as well as professionally-, and an unfair (lack of) understanding and promotion of Norway's values and interests abroad.

Since the number of international students in Norway is expected to double (and reach the quota of 20% of the student body) in the next few years, among a parallel increase of the percentage of Norwegian students,

In this respect, ISU would like to suggest and kindly ask from its Partner student organisations (NSU and StL) to:

1. Increase of the number *of degree-oriented* English-medium instructed *programmes* both in Bachelor and Master level.
2. Ensure access (on an equal base) of international students in *single subject courses*, especially relevant for Master and PhD level courses.
3. Ensure *high quality and academic standards* of Norwegian education, through improving existing supportive (teaching and research) material and quality of training and fluency in English of academic staff. (Competence in academic English should be a requirement when hiring academic staff to teach courses in English, and lecturers should be encouraged to take English courses to improve their level of academic English.)
4. International students to be included in the scientific *assessment work* on the same level with Norwegian students.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of foreign students studying in Norway rose from 7.490 in 1997/1998 to 8.533 in 2000/2001 ("Minifakta about Norway" (Education), published by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 2009, available at [www.ssb.no/english/subjects/00/minifakta\\_en/en/](http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/00/minifakta_en/en/)), and from 14.294 students in 2006 to 15.493 in 2008 (Statistics Norway, "Facts about Education in Norway 2010 – key figures 2008", available at [www.ssb.no/english/subjects/04/02/facts/facts2010.pdf](http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/04/02/facts/facts2010.pdf)), and 12.648 in 2009 (Report No.14 to the Storting regarding "Internationalisation of Education in Norway" - White Paper).

<sup>2</sup> According to data found at the Report 14 to the Storting (p.12), "in 2008 there were 5.054 foreign exchange students" attending Higher Education Institutions.



5. Ensure that procedures for prior approval of subjects for international students to be enrolled are being simplified, and that international researchers and students do not experience unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles/barriers for accessing higher education in Norway.
6. Facilitate *social integration* through *more inclusive education* of both Norwegian and international students, as well as *better and more* allocation of **housing and language courses guaranteed** to the latter (with the goal to reach the point where *all* enrolled international students would be guaranteed accommodation and language courses; important criteria for the better allocation of accommodation should be maximizing the mutual profit/gain from “cultural exposure” between Norwegian and international students).
7. Enhance inclusive representation and democracy on the local level, as well as student environment for local student democracies and student population, by ensuring that *all information* from Institutions, Samskipnaden and local student democracies is **equally available, accessible and understandable by all students** (both in Norwegian and *in English*).
8. Ensure democratic representation and visibility of international students in local press and media.
9. Ensure that international students would be guaranteed the **opportunity to representation and effective access in democratic processes** in local democracy and in student councils and committees, student welfare organizations and the administrations of institutions of higher education in Norway.
10. **Support** (*financially, organisationally and morally*) **actions** towards enabling international students to maximize their exposure to Norwegian society and culture, and Norwegian students towards strengthening cooperation and maximising profit from the “cultural exchange”.
11. Promote and cultivate a strong **mentality of cooperation** between local student democracies and ISU branches, through ensuring that local student democracies will plan, implement, participate and follow-up appropriate ‘plans of action’, specifically oriented towards international students, as well as promoting actively a political and social ground where local student democracies (NSU/StL and ISU branches) will feel comfortable in participating in common actions and projects.
12. Ensure that (higher) **education will remain a publicly accessible good**, which would be provided to all students for free, and that equal treatment will be safeguarded for all students in the future (“no tuition fees for all”).
13. Increase the number and quality of **student employment**, by taking in consideration the international factor, as well as the international students’ need for active participation and involvement in processes relevant to the use and availability of student jobs, libraries and cafeterias.
14. Ensure that international students will be encouraged to gain **practical experience** related to their education, during and after completion of their studies in Norway, and in connection with their program of study.



## Quota scheme<sup>3</sup> program funding while on exchange

A recent letter/ruling from SIU, in November 2009, informed Institutions participating in the Quota scheme program that Quota funding will not be *anymore* available for any time spent on exchange, as a non-compulsory part of the study program studied. Such a restrictive ruling has recently been made to the effect that Quota students will not have access *at all* to the funding for any semester spent abroad that otherwise this category of students would be eligible for.

After examining the *Lånekassen's current regulations*, it has been concluded that Quota students are not mentioned in the list of foreign citizens who can get funding while on exchange from Norway<sup>4</sup>, but at the same time such an option is not excluded specifically for them either in the part concerning Quota students<sup>5</sup>.

This new ruling, which was intended to “*clarify the guidelines for Quota students who would opt for spending a study period in a third country as part of the degree they undertake in Norway under the Quota Scheme*”, has **not applied to Quota students in previous years**, and concerns only the Quota students and no other category of international students receiving educational aid from Lånekassen.

Since ISU believes that such a letter/ruling (a) **does not serve the objective of the Quota program**, which is to enrich with knowledge, skills and new impulses students from developing countries when returning to their home countries and/or Norway, (b) **nor abides by the efforts towards better internationalisation** and education within Norway; but, above all, (c) **does not provide Norwegian and international students (eligible under the Quota scheme funding) an equal footing**,

In this respect, ISU would like to suggest and kindly ask from its Partner student organisations (NSU and StL) to:

- Ensure that ***Quota funding will continue to be available*** for a study period spent on exchange as part of a degree.

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<sup>3</sup> The Quota scheme programme awards NOK85,000 per year - with an additional amount to cover travel expenses - to students from certain developing countries that will be studying in Norway. Various requirements must be met before someone can be considered eligible for a Quota bursary and only a limited number are made available - through the SIU and Lånekassen - to each Norwegian university.

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to part 1, § 2-2.

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to part 6 § 46-1 – 51-4.



## **Expulsion of international students based on nationality and study subject**

Within 2009, there have been three cases in Norway, where international students have been revoked of their residence permit due to the Norwegian Police Security Service's (PST) interpretation of resolutions from the UN. The three cases include one Iranian and two North-Korean students, who were enrolled in studies which the police regarded as dangerous, due to these countries' development of weapons of mass destruction.

The Iranian student had been studying Norwegian for a year, and had just been accepted to a bachelor-programme in satellite technology when he was denied an extended residence permit and encouraged to leave the country as soon as possible, while the other two students were revoked of their residence permit and told to leave the country, just before starting their doctoral studies in computer and electronic sciences, after (and even though) the University which invited them to Norway had cleared the situation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prior to their arrival. Such incidents have resulted in a great amount of **engagement and concern within the international student population in Norway**, as well as **uncertainty among prospective international students abroad**.

In this respect, a meeting has been arranged in the end of January 2010, where Svein Erik Molstad and Trond Hugubakken from PST has attended together with ISU, NSU and StL, the outcome of which has confirmed the existence of a group (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, PST and UDI) which, at first, aims to clarify how the issue of control over the transfer of knowledge can be handled, then adopt a more inclusive legislation and finally, find a way of implementing effectively such legislation. ISU, NSU and StL offered their full support and collaboration towards their efforts to resolving such problematic issue.

In this respect, ISU would like to suggest and kindly ask from its Partner student organisations (NSU and StL) to:

- *Ensure that the solution proposed, as adopted by ISU and NSU/StL Resolutions in late 2009, will be followed up (i.e. **put down and make publicly available a clear and effective set of rules/Guidelines in which the institutions and students can relate to** for application purposes, so that the enforcement of the UN-resolutions are not as arbitrary as they now can seem to be).*



## Social security number and VISA issuance procedures

It is very common for new international students arriving in Norway to face the challenge of not receiving a social security number earlier than a month and a half from the application date (processing time of fully completed applications in Oslo is -according to the instructions provided to students- 3 weeks, after the first 3 weeks needed for the issuance of a residence permit).

Such situation becomes problematic because of the urgent and basic need of getting access to a bank account, financial institutions, university and other services, which otherwise they are unable to receive.

As for the alternative to apply for a provisional number (called D-number)<sup>6</sup>, the procedure – apart from being also very slow (needs also 3 weeks processing time)- is not actually supported practically by banks (which avoid easing students apply for such number).

Finally, the problem of issuance of a VISA becomes challenging for degree students, since issuance for a limited period of only a year challenges the effective attendance and the certainty needed by students who are being accepted to undertake a 2 or more years degree course. Also, UDI's Visa regulations for international students (outside EU/EEC) that want to invite their partners/family to visit them while they are in Norway is unfoundedly restricting significantly such possibility.

In this respect, ISU would like to suggest and kindly ask from its Partner student organisations (NSU and StL) to:

- ***Support ISU in removing unnecessary administrative barriers*** to international students that are currently in place in the form of residence permits and visa procedures (such as through the provision of different from immigrants and students working hours every working day of the week, applications to be submitted electronically and/or in different offices than the immigrants, and so on).

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<sup>6</sup> Only in case residence permit is being sought for a period of less than 6 months.