



To: State Secretary Mr. Kyrre Lekve

From: International Students' Union of Norway (ISU)

Date: February 10, 2010

Subject:

- Student explosion and *sustainable internationalisation*
- Quota scheme program funding while on exchange
- Expulsion of international students based on nationality and study subject
- Social security number and VISA issuance procedures

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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 destination¹.

Such increase, which is mainly attributed to short-term studying (3 to 12 months)², boosted unexpectedly the need for (and thus, Higher Institutions' and Studentsamskipnaden' 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 to the State Secretary and kindly ask from the Government to:

- Ensure **high quality** (and increase the number) **of degree-oriented** English-medium instructed **programmes**, by improving the available supportive teaching and research material and the quality of training and fluency in English of academic staff.
- 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* offered to the latter.
- **Liberalize training and employment policies and regulations** to enable international students to maximize their exposure to Norwegian society and culture through internships and employment.

¹ The number of foreign students studying in Norway rose from 7.490 in 1997/1998 to 8.533 in 2000/2001 ("Minifacts 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/), 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), and 12.648 in 2009 (Report No.14 to the Storting regarding "Internationalisation of Education in Norway" - White Paper).

² 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.



Quota scheme³ 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 Norway⁴, but at the same time such an option is not excluded specifically for them either in the part concerning Quota students⁵.

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 to the State Secretary and kindly ask from the Government to:

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

³ 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.

⁴ Please refer to part 1, § 2-2.

⁵ 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 to the State Secretary and kindly ask from the Government to:

- *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)⁶, 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.

In this respect, ISU would like to suggest to the State Secretary and kindly ask from the Government to:

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

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