

## ISU Policy Paper 2018-2022

Principles set out the organization's basic principles and general political priorities. Principles are superior to other policy documents.

Higher education provides benefits to society. Education increases the potential value of an individual's contribution to society and to the overall quality of life. The opportunity to pursue higher education is important for promoting social mobility, and thus there is a government responsibility to ensure that regardless of background. Since higher education is a good thing and social benefit increasing with the width of enrolment, it is important that everyone has equal opportunity to pursue higher education.

Principles of ISU are therefore educational benefit and equality, and apply to Norwegians as well as international students.

The main principle is best assured when the main part of the education is financed through public funds and offered as free public education. The first advantage to free public education is primarily to create value, to preserve the democratic rule of community and to meet society's needs for labor over time. Secondly it helps improve the political and administrative institutions. Education and research is good for each person who takes part in it, but the design should be in line with society's needs in the short and long term.

### **Internationalization**

Internationalization of higher education in Norway is becoming increasingly important and increasingly prevalent within the education policy. Internationalization of higher education contributes to increased academic dividend for students and staff and hence better quality of education.

Students studying in Norway help to enrich Norwegian society and their communities when they finished their studies and return to their homes. Internationalization provides educational benefit if the local branches have good formulated internationalization strategies. Norway has to be a pioneer for countries that want and need skills development in their own education.

### **Formal Equality**

Everyone should have the opportunity to pursue higher education. This is ensured primarily through formal equality, which means that academia should be a system where public transparency and formal eligibility are the most important selection criterion. General admission will be the main road into higher education and grades shall be primary selection mechanism.

### **Real Equality**

In order to ensure real equality in education informal barriers must be removed and that finance should not be an obstacle to pursue higher education. Tuition should not be a barrier to higher education.

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Free principle means that all public higher education should be free. The principle of free public education must apply to all students, including international students.

Internationalization of higher education is to increase cooperation on education across borders. In addition, all internationalization is about creating an understanding of a globalised world, and to make students qualified to work and conduct research in an international academic and labor arena.

Norway is actively participating in international education processes affecting Norwegian higher education with the intent to disseminating good examples and safeguarding Norwegian students, staff and institutions' interests.

ISU should be represented in Norwegian forums to represent international students' rights.

## **ISU's principle policies shall be:**

1. The principle of free education
2. Equal right to quality of education
3. Inclusion and integration of international students
4. Quality Norwegian language courses and English programs
5. Free movers (Self financing) visa conditions

## **ISU believes that:**

The principle of public responsibility for financing higher education must be strengthened. Transition between education and work for international students should be enhanced. Funding should not come from students through tuition fees. Education should be a public responsibility, funded through public investment.

ISU's work is rooted in human rights and supports the national commitments to effectively implement human rights that affect students and educators. In particular, it is important to build on conventions that protect equal access to higher education, combating discrimination, democratic participation, freedom of expression, the right of association, protection of cultural, social and economic rights of students. Equal right to education is not a reality in most countries. This is both a problem in specific countries and a threat to the Norwegian model as the increased market focus in education also affects the discourse about how the Norwegian education system is organized.

The right to an independent and democratic education is an important basic principle of political, social and economic development. An inclusive education of high quality is the most important tool for creating sustainability and achieving development.

It is essential to have a holistic approach to the internationalization of higher education and research. It's time to shift focus from quantitative measure of mobility to qualitative measures, where good mobility agreements and integration of study and research is central to both international students and Norway.

International students are global innovators with global connections: they can help Norway become a future leader in research, innovation and the application of new technologies.

Norwegian students can greatly benefit from the diversity of nationalities, cultural background, knowledge and perspectives that international students might bring to any course or institution. This allows for first-hand experience in sharing information, understanding, and working together with people from different cultures; an invaluable asset in today's globalised world.

## **1. Tuition Fees**

The introduction of user fees or application fees for international students is discrimination of a single group. Such an arrangement is contrary to the equal right to education and will further increase the economic barrier for foreign students to study in Norway. This will reduce the diversity of Norwegian higher education and reduce the quality of the education and internationalization. The free education principle also applies to international students, and no students under any circumstances should have to pay to do research or study in Norway.

## **2. Inclusion of International Students**

Norway's involvement in, and firm commitment towards several 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 choose Norway as their educational destination.

Such increase, which is mainly attributed to short-term studying (3 to 12 months), boosted unexpectedly the need for (and thus, Higher Institutions' and Studentsamskipnadens obligations towards) supplying study programs, accommodation and language courses towards a continuously renewable (and steadily increasing) international student body, without prioritizing on quality when focusing on internationalization 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.

ISU sees inclusion of international students into the student activists and Norwegian society as a natural and important part of Norwegian higher education. The Norwegian society requires a highly educated population that is aware of its professional environment outside of the borders. International influence on Norwegian higher education leads to an important increase in knowledge about different traditions and cultures. Exchange and knowledge cooperation across national borders should be an impetus for institutions to get involved internationally and to continuously develop their own programs.

## 3.1 Welfare

Educational institutions have overall responsibility for international student welfare and student organizations have the operative responsibility. The student welfare services should be a supplement and not a substitute for public responsibility for welfare.

Student Welfare shall enable everyone to begin and finish higher education, regardless of circumstances.

One of the key conditions for sustainable internationalization is that institutions take greater responsibility for providing housing to its international students.

ISU believes institutions have a special responsibility for the inclusion of international students at the institutions. It is important that international students coming to Norway are academically and socially included and that they receive the same offers as Norwegian students. Welfare organizations (Studentsamskipnadene) must also facilitate good information in both English and Norwegian to ensure equal access to welfare services. Norway must follow the developments going on globally, and educate students who are equipped to participate and work in a global society.

Institutions should guarantee accommodation to all incoming international students to study in Norway. Language learning, inclusion, health and general welfare benefits must be offered to all international students. Governments and educational institutions should be both responsible for sustainable internationalization, but must cooperate with welfare organizations to meet students' needs. To ensure sustainable internationalization the educational institutions must put a ceiling on the number of international students they can take up if necessary.

### Special needs

The studies must be universally designed and adapted individually to meet with students special needs. It should also be made for flexible teaching and assessment.

International students who face barriers in the form of a new culture, new language and education, also need special adaptations.

## 3.2. Student Democracy

A good and sustainable internationalization in Norway relies on good dialogues with the international students' own representatives. There must also be collaboration on how to better inclusion of international students both academically and socially.

International students must have the opportunity to influence their campuses through local student democracies. Information about opportunities for student participation must also spread to international students.

### 3. Norwegian Language Courses

All students who come to Norway should be offered the Norwegian language. This provision should be free. ISU wants to facilitate international students studying in Norway to participate in the Norwegian labor market and in academia after their studies. There is a high need to master the language among free movers/self financing students and quota students group.

ISU wants Norwegian to be a core subject. It should not be offered outside of the study plan (night courses etc) or as an elective subject. For the free principle, it should be a core subject. There should be free Norwegian language training to all international students.

### 4. English Medium Programs

All educational institutions should offer high-quality studies in other languages than Norwegian. While Norwegian should be maintained as the main language of higher education institutions in Norway, the provision should be made for the teaching of languages other than Norwegian. This is a prerequisite to achieve the exchange of expertise between Norwegian and foreign students, as well as promote the inclusion of international students.

One of the most important conditions for ensuring the quality of courses in English is that the staff speak English well. The institutions shall ensure that the quality assurance system also maintains the quality of the language, as well as the academic quality. Furthermore, the institutions offer examinations in English in all subjects where there is not a point in itself that it is in Norwegian.

There is a need to develop a wider range of courses in English, of high quality. ISU believes that institutions must focus on inclusion of international at their institutions. This must be done by increasing the use of international literature, the creation of several courses in English, better inclusion of international students and increased use of Norwegian language courses at different levels.

More topics in English will help to ensure that all Norwegian students have the opportunity to learn international terminology and can be secured international experience also in Norway.

### 5. Self-financing Students Visa Conditions

Self-financing international students outside the EU/EEA, require a study visa to come and study in Norway. In order to obtain the visa, they must show that they have sufficient funds to study and live in Norway during their studies. The amount they must evidence corresponds to the amount of full support from the Norwegian State Education Loan Fund (116369 NOK for the academic year 2017-2018). They must have this amount in Norwegian kroner and it has to be shown in a bank statement before they are issued a visa. Once they fulfil the criteria, they are issued a one year visa, even if their studies are two or four years. Every year students are required to renew their visa and they must prove that they have sufficient funds to study and live in Norway. The increasing subsistence money



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is becoming a hinderance for international students. ISU believes that a convenient method can be quarterly reports instead of the one off currently demanded by UDI.

ISU believes that the quality of education could be improved if the students are initially asked to proof that they can support themselves during the full length of their degree and thus issued with a visa for the entire period. Alternatively, the visa is renewed on the basis that students show academic progress report rather than money. This is to avoid the situation where continuing international students are forced by the circumstance to run after funding and have little time for their academic work. It would help international students to concentrate more on their studies so the situation where most international students have to ask for extensions for the submission of their thesis would be reduced to the minimum.

ISU believes that student visa should be given once covering the entire period of study. This reduces the cost and the related bureaucracy of applying every 12 months. Besides the visa cost has risen steadily this year from 3200 NOK to 5300. ISU believes that this is unfair increase and makes it further difficult for international students to come to Norway and financially challenging for international students already in Norway.