

## **Session 8: Workshop 5**

**Title:** The Value to a Small Country of Promoting Student Mobility

**Presenter:** Dr Roger Svensson, Managing Director, Swedish Foundation for International Co-operation in Research and Higher Education (STINT)

**Chair:** Dr Thikoi Jonathan, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, National University of Lesotho

### **Presentation**

#### *Introduction: context & definitions*

Dr Svensson made it clear at the start of his presentation that he was not offering the 'official Swedish position' but speaking on behalf of STINT (the Swedish Foundation for International Co-operation in Research and Higher Education), which is an independently endowed foundation set up in Sweden in 1994.

The definition of a 'small' country in the context of Sweden is not one that is small geographically or in terms of its GDP, but rather in its limited population, which stands at 9 million and which is not growing but ageing. There is, therefore, a decreasing pool of human resource talent.

Sweden's business enterprise sector is export oriented and dominated by a few large, knowledge-based industries. Examples of trans-national & merged groups include Volvo (with Ford), Astra (with Zeneca) and Ericsson (with Sony). These industries demand highly skilled manpower - especially in the science and engineering disciplines - which it is difficult for the Swedish higher education/research system to supply. It was particularly interesting to note that Ericsson's Research and Development budget is almost a third of total public spending on research and development in Sweden; and that the pharmaceutical industries are even more R&D intensive.

#### *Swedish higher education*

Sweden's higher education sector is experiencing a period of rapid expansion. The aim is to have a 50% cohort in higher education and to increase the number of PhDs from 2,000 to 5,000. Given, however, the problems of ageing faculty (large numbers will be retiring in the next 10-15 years) there are pressures not only to increase faculty numbers but also to replace those who will be retiring. There is, in effect, a 'battle' for brain-power both nationally and internationally.

Student choice is another area of concern. In Sweden too many science and engineering programmes are under-subscribed by Swedish students. Affluent middle-class students are more likely to opt for other careers. International students, on the other hand, and Swedish students who have an immigrant background (some 15% of the Swedish population have parents born outside Sweden) do favour science and engineering.

It is essential, therefore, that:

- the best possible use is made of Sweden's limited pool of talent
- as many talented international students as possible are recruited
- Sweden maintains and widens its knowledge networks and
- funds/resources these opportunities

The over-riding axiom, however, is that student choice cannot be interfered with.

#### *Student mobility: the benefits of networks*

There is much that a small country stands to gain from a high level of student mobility, irrespective of whether, upon the conclusion of the period of "foreign" study, the home student:

- returns to his/her home country and enters the labour force
- remains in country where he/she was fully/partially educated
- goes to third country upon completion of his/her studies

None of these eventualities is detrimental, especially for a small country. There is real value to be gained from a large number of operating networks with many countries and student mobility generates the potentiality for new networks, both formal and informal. It is commonly acknowledged that shared educational experiences can lead to the development of very strong networks.

Similarly, although in many countries the current focus is on the income generating potential of recruiting international students, the real benefits to a small country such as Sweden rest in the very extensive networks and levels of understanding that will be the long-term results thereof. And an additional benefit, of course, is that increasing the numbers of international students helps to make good the shortfall in native Swedish student numbers.

#### *Student loans facilitate study abroad*

Sweden offers a heavily subsidised loan system which, following changes some six or seven years ago, now makes it possible for Swedish students to take their loans to any accredited higher education institution in the world. Furthermore, they can even borrow extra money for the heavy tuition fees that may be payable outside Sweden.

#### *A Case Study: Chinese Faculty and Students in Sweden*

An immensely important network is being created by those currently studying in Sweden under mobility agreements with China. There are now some 1,400 Chinese post-graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and visiting academics in the Swedish university system and all are confident that, whether they remain in Sweden, return to China or move on, say, to the USA, the way will have been paved not only for on-going connectivity with them but also for more students and faculty to follow.

### *The marketable benefits of studying abroad*

Some of the marketable benefits of studying abroad are that the additional experience, and broadening of the mind, differentiates the individual from the crowd, demonstrates his/her initiative, and may also include new or improved foreign language skills.

### *STINT: Scholarships*

STINT offers a variety of programmes including:

- Post-doctoral awards which enable young Swedish PhD holders to spend one or two years in research within the international university sector (many in the US)
- A scholarship programme, set up four years ago, for students from certain countries such as the 'emerging market economies' in Latin America, South Africa and the Asia Pacific region, to read for Master's degrees (mainly in engineering, public health and economics) at Swedish universities. These students may opt to work on their dissertations either in co-operation with a Swedish firm/organisation or in their home country; and as a result of the programme may be encouraged either to remain in Sweden for doctoral studies or be taken on as employees of Swedish firms working in their home countries. Either way, both Sweden (her universities and her industries) and the students themselves are deemed to benefit from the relationship.

The focus of this programme is on emerging market economies partly in order to encourage mobility to countries other than the customary student choices of Europe and the United States, and partly for the intrinsic value, from the cultural, economic and academic perspective, of learning about developments in these regions.

- An exchange programme (minimum four months each) for PhD students in the humanities and social sciences.

(Interestingly, all new PhD candidates in Finland, regardless of subject, are required to spend some study time abroad.)

### *Conclusion*

In concluding his presentation, Dr Svensson re-iterated his contention that a small country such as Sweden has no real alternative but to stimulate both inward and outward student mobility if it wants to establish and nurture mutually beneficial networks and counter the shortages in its pool of human resources. Mobility is also, however, a useful, albeit indirect, means of bench-marking as it demonstrates which universities are most attractive to international students.

### **Discussion**

The participants at this session represented a broad range of developed and developing countries, and the discussion pointed on the one hand to a common recognition of the benefits of mobility in terms of human resource development and the value (current and future) of developing networks; and on the other hand to some differences of need, perception and expectation. There was evidence to suggest, for instance, that for some

of the developing country members the notion of mobility was primarily one of donor aid and direct assistance rather than of shared benefits; and that the real value of mobility lay in enhanced training and employment opportunities. The issues that proved to be of most interest to the developed country members, however, revolved around funding problems, student loan systems, international student recruitment and the worrying topic of student choice (of subject of study).

Nevertheless, all were agreed about:

- the value of mobility as a resource in the development of human capacity
- the importance of exchange programmes in developing viable academic links (for both teaching and research) not only between individuals but also between institutions
- the value of mobility in furthering an understanding of different cultures and political/social/economic environments
- how important it is that mobility should be encouraged from north to south and between developing countries as well as into and between developed countries.