

National Union of Icelandic Students

*The National Union of Icelandic
Students' Policy Regarding
Internationalization in Icelandic
Universities*



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Universities

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A clear policy regarding the internationalization of Icelandic universities is a necessary step towards a more internationally competitive education system, a more open-minded community, a more diverse workforce, and more powerful academia. Internationalization has made it easier to forge connections between individuals, associations, and institutions all around the world. Internationalization also facilitates increased understanding and faster communications between countries and cultures. The basis of this policy is that equal opportunity to studies, be they domestic or international, be one of the facets of a successful society. This should also be the basis of policies made by the state as well as Icelandic universities. Universities and educational authorities are encouraged to develop a policy about internationalization of Icelandic universities in cooperation with students. Furthermore, universities and educational authorities should collect data about internationalization.

Mobility is a term that has been used to describe international flow of students and faculty. It is one of the main tenets of internationalization within universities. The benefits of mobility can be evaluated on an individual basis as well as on the impact that mobility has on universities as a collective. An important part of studying abroad is to acquaint oneself with a new culture and new customs that widen one's perspective. This leads to increased tolerance amongst individuals. Students that go on foreign exchange have more respect for the values and opinions of others after their stay abroad¹. Mobility also facilitates the movement of knowledge between countries. This enriches a community and allows for entrepreneurship and progression. The number of students and academics that look for opportunities abroad can also give a good idea about the status and success of internationalization. Universities and educational authorities shall strive for 40% of their Icelandic graduates to have had an experience abroad by 2030. As for faculty, there is a special focus put on the mobility of academic staff and teacher education. Giving these individuals experiences abroad is the single most powerful way to increase diversity in studies as well as teaching methods. An "experience abroad" can be, among other things, short and long student exchanges, vocational training, courses, as well as studies towards a degree abroad.

2.1. Icelandic Students Abroad

Universities in Iceland must ensure a wide variety of opportunities for Icelandic students to obtain an experience abroad. This can be done, for example, by cultivating relationships with more foreign universities. International connections lead to better education as well as more adaptable students and faculty that can withstand the demands and challenges that define the community in the present and future. Study abroad, whether for a shorter or longer period of time, also entails a considerable amount of informal education. Students learn to adapt to new systems, cultures, and job customs. Along the way, they will acquire skills that come to good use in future jobs. Study abroad also allows students to mature personally and socially. Students acquaint themselves with a country other than their native one, which makes them more capable of adapting to different situations, increases their connections to people from a different cultural background, and improves their language competency². Universities in Iceland have the obligation to inform students about all of their opportunities to study abroad and to be of assistance during the application process. Those that are studying abroad can look to the Icelandic Student Loan Fund (Icelandic: Lánasjóður íslenskra námsmanna, abbreviated as LÍN) as well as the Association for Icelandic Students Overseas (Icelandic: Samband íslenskra námsmanna erlendis, abbreviated as SÍNE. Note: the association does not have an official English name) if necessary.

2.1.1. Obstacles

It is necessary to ensure easier access to experiences abroad for a wider range of students, some of which have different needs. Universities and educational authorities must map out the obstacles that exist when students are considering studying abroad. This could be done by obtaining statistical information pertaining to this³. About 10% of Icelandic students have applied for temporary studies abroad and about 29% of them wish to study abroad later in their academic career. The future goal is to break down the barriers in place so that the group of students that have experiences abroad becomes more diverse. It is important to consider the varied backgrounds of students, especially for institutions such as Erasmus, Nordplus, and other institutions that give students the chance to apply for grants towards study abroad programs and vocational training. The national offices of Erasmus and Nordplus should launch their grant systems here in Iceland so that the students who need the most financial help will be assisted. For example, students with disabilities or families. These grant systems should also offer various ways to have an experience abroad, regarding both the length of stay abroad as well as internationalization on the home front.

2.1.2. Full-time Students Abroad

Icelandic full-time students abroad should enjoy the same rights to financial assistance as students in Iceland, whether that help comes from the Icelandic Student Loan Fund or from a similar

source. The main obstacles before full-time students abroad are financial. This is due to, among other things, insufficient financial support towards living costs and tuition fees. The Icelandic Student Loan Fund shall ensure secure financial support for Icelandic students as well as provide loans for tuition fees in concordance with their actual need. The Icelandic Student Loan Fund shall always consult SÍNE when decisions are made about the finances of Icelandic students abroad.

2.1.3. Exchange Studies and Vocational Training

The goals of exchange studies and vocational training on the university level can be numerous. They can be to increase the quality of university studies with a wide range of study options, as well as enhance one's abilities, skills, and give students more possibilities in the job market upon the conclusion of studies. Students that have received vocational training consider themselves better prepared to think logically and come to conclusions⁴. All students shall be guaranteed equal rights to exchange studies and vocational training regardless of their field of study, university, or socioeconomic status. It is important that universities take an active part and show initiative by supporting increased student exchanges and vocational training whether it is by way of sending students abroad or taking in more students from abroad. Universities must ensure a mobility window in the curricula of each study program that allows for

exchange studies and vocational training, without it delaying their graduation. These mobility windows must also allow for changes within majors. It is of utmost importance to recognize a student's internationally-completed credits once they have arrived home.

2.2. International Students in Iceland

International students are registered in either full-time studies, exchange studies, or vocational studies here in Iceland. They enrich the Icelandic community as well as move the community towards open-mindedness and progression. Universities shall ensure their access to education on all levels of the Icelandic university system. The Icelandic job market also largely benefits from taking more international students into vocational training. There is a clear profit that follows with increased internationalization in the workplace, among other settings. A student in unpaid vocational training shall not come in the place of paid employees. A student in vocational training shall always receive learning opportunities and shall be provided with an advisor within the workplace that students may look to. There also must be a clear process in place to solve problems that can arise. Universities are obligated to ensure that all departments within their university work systematically towards internationalization. Universities must be ready to help international students and have a good flow of information regarding their rights and social life within their universities.

2.2.1. Obstacles

Universities should uproot obstacles that stand in the way of international students in Iceland. An example of an obstacle is a shortage of information about the application process, study possibilities, their rights, and housing.

Furthermore, obstacles can be a limited choice of courses, little opportunity to have an active social life, and lack of special resources for parents, students with disabilities, and other students that need additional support. International students shall always be given the best support possible.

2.2.2. Reception of International Students

It is important that Icelandic universities, especially students, welcome international students that come to Iceland. Student associations shall work with the international office of their university to provide possibilities for international students to participate in the social life of the university to the same extent as Icelandic students do. International students must enjoy the same rights as Icelandic students within Icelandic universities. They should be able to study a wide variety of subjects in English while in Iceland. As a result, each faculty within each university should investigate the possibilities of increased course offerings in English. Icelandic universities shall work towards being able to offer their international students free Icelandic lessons. Similarly, Icelandic universities shall have a mentor program in place for international students in order to better help them assimilate to their new country as well as to combat social isolation.

2.2.3. Residence Permits

Students that come from states outside the European Economic Area and

European Free Trade Association need a student residence permit from the Directorate of Immigration in order to study in Iceland. The Directorate of Immigration shall process residence permits as quickly as possible. This is because delays in processing can result in a student not being able to begin their studies in Iceland at the anticipated time. Residence permits for full-time students should be valid an entire course of study. Today, the status is such that students must renew their permits every six months, leading to a lot of uncertainty. The Directorate of Immigration shall then review its regulations regarding the requirements of secure support. The goal of the review should be to implement a fairer and more flexible handling of student permits. Additionally, family reunification should be available to all student residence permit holders regardless of educational level.

2.3. Refugees and Immigrants

Refugees are a group of people that have had to escape their home country due to circumstances beyond their control. Immigrants are people that move to a country with the objective of living there for a longer period of time or perhaps even permanently. Migrants are people that have moved to a country with the objective of living there for a definite period of time. For these groups, studies are not the grounds for their residence here in Iceland.

Government authorities shall give refugees information about their rights to education in Iceland. It shall then be the goal of government authorities to ensure that refugees', immigrants', and migrants' education and work experience be recognized in Iceland.

2.3.1. Access to Studies

So as to overcome various obstacles (i.e. language barriers), universities and government authorities shall provide clear information and an easy and transparent application process. It is necessary for universities to step up and remove the roadblocks that stand before refugees. Universities shall also work towards being able to offer refugees and migrants free Icelandic lessons.

2.3.2. Recognition

Refugees and migrants must be able to have previous studies recognized here in Iceland should their studies be able to count towards credits. Government authorities are responsible for ensuring

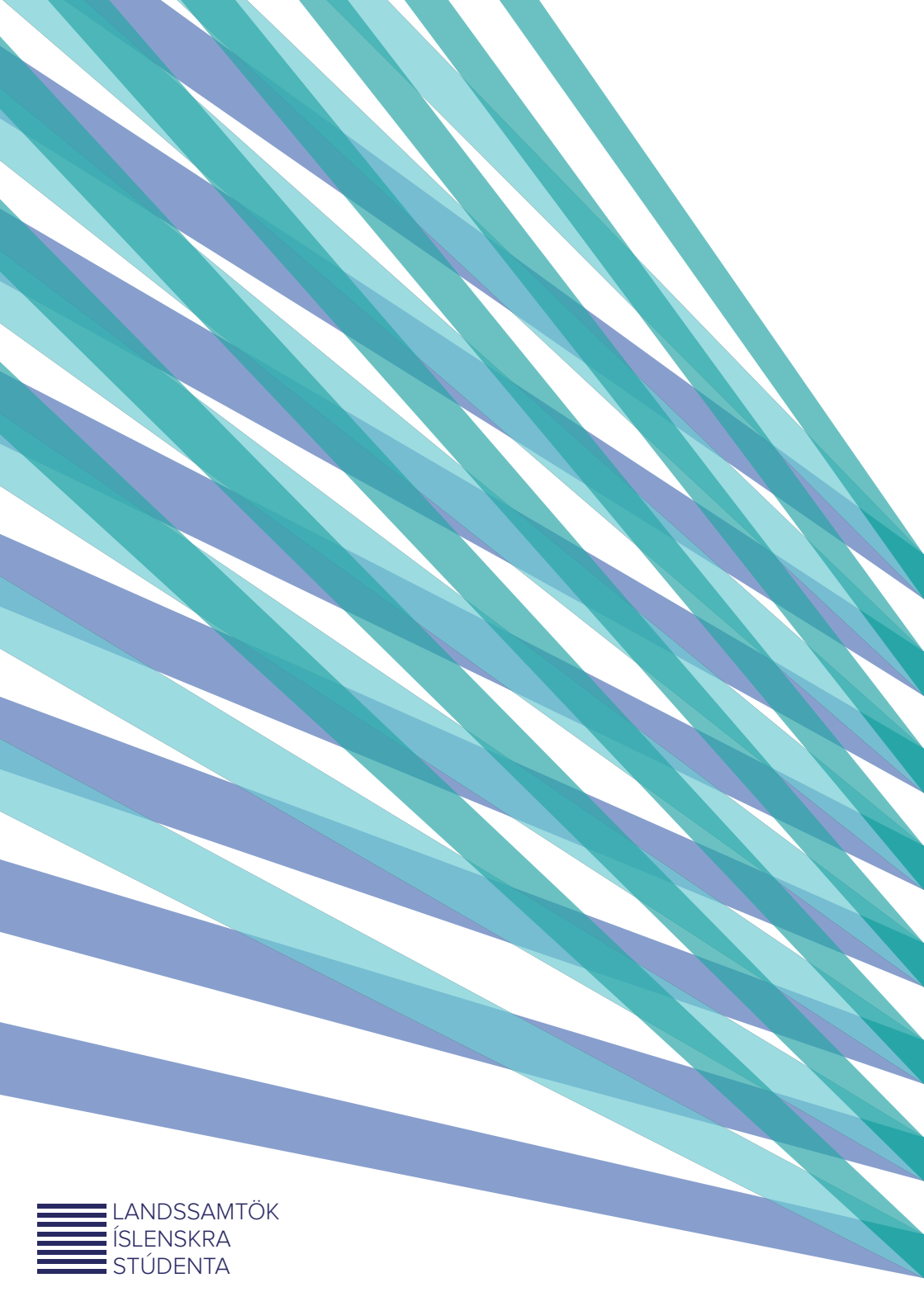
that recognition of prior studies follows a clear, fair, and standardized process in cooperation with universities. Those that are rejected recognition of prior studies must receive instructions on how they can acquire the knowledge necessary so that their studies meet the requirements set. If this group can prove their prior studies, they should absolutely be able to pursue further studies or work in their field while in Iceland.

1 Áhrif E+ á lýðræðisþátttöku. (e.d.). Retrieved March 22, 2019, from <https://infograph.vengage.com/ps/BV2vjDMnivM/5-facts-sectional>

2 Brandenburg, U., Berghoff, S., Taboadela, O., European Commission, and Directorate-General for Education and Culture. (2014). The Erasmus impact study effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Retrieved from: <http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:NC0414545:EN:HTML>

3 Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið og Rannís. (2018). Eurostudent VI: Innlit í flæði íslenskra háskólanema. Reykjavík: Maskína.

4 Áhrif E+ á lýðræðisþátttöku. (e.d.). Retrieved March 22, 2019, from <https://infograph.vengage.com/ps/BV2vjDMnivM/5-facts-sectional>



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