

SASNET workshop 2006 on The role of South Asia in the internationalisation of higher education in Sweden

Presentation by Niklas Tranaeus, Swedish Institute, in the panel discussion about:

Best Strategy for marketing Swedish HE in South Asia and for sending students to South Asia

SIs role to attract students to Sweden through promotion and scholarships

My comment initially is only on this part

We need to ask ourselves what the objective is. There have been contradictions and mixed signals from the government.

Needed: more coherent national strategy from the government.

SI has the mission to promote Sweden as a study destination in co-operation with HEI's. We are specifically instructed to consult the HEI's in this matter, which we would do in any case. Not doing it would be rather pointless.

We have set up a consultation group with representatives from nine HEI's to discuss how we can market Swedish HE better. If tuition fees are introduced there will of course be an increased need, but many universities tell us we need to co-operate much more regardless of tuition fees.

We have of course worked closely with HEIs for a number of years in this area and we invited institutions that already have many master's programmes and showed a strong interest in cooperating regarding marketing tuition based courses.

The HEI's are: Lund, BTH, Linköping, Chalmers, KI, KTH, SU, Mdh and Umeå

The group has met during the fall and we are working on a proposal for a national strategy to make Sweden more attractive as a study destination.

We believe that if Sweden is to become successful in this area, given the ever increasing competition, we need to take a broad view of what must be done. We could for instance spend many millions on marketing Sweden only to be thwarted by the Migration Board or shortage of housing or something else. To a large extent the group makes its case on what is written on this in the inquiry on tuition fees. We want to reaffirm the points that are made in the inquiry.

I want to return to the issue of the objective. So far the government has not been very clear what it wants. Clearly there are contradictions. The idea that tuition fees can be introduced and that more students then will come, while we save Swedish tax payers money all at the same time is misguided to say the least.

The Swedish Institute and the consultation group believe that attracting foreign students and promoting exchange in general is a strategic issue of enormous importance. At the same time we believe that if this is done, it must be sustainable in the long run. The way things are going now there is a risk of a serious backlash. I am thinking in particular of the contradictions between the sometimes very suspicious approach of the Migration Board and the government's encouragement of institutions recruiting more international students.

Obviously introducing tuition fees, would be painful in the short run. Even if a rather extensive system of scholarships is put into place and the budget for marketing Sweden as a study destination increases considerably the number of students from countries outside the EU may decrease in the short run. But financing foreign students from lower income countries through development co-operation funding and through funding intended for promotion of Sweden abroad would be more transparent than financing a large part of this through higher education funding. It might also be more sustainable.

We think that a Danish situation (where the number of students from countries outside EU has fallen sharply) can be avoided if the government does adopt a long term strategy for this. Apart from more scholarships and more funding for promotion, key issues will be to ensure that the Migration Board is given adequate resources and clear directions, to ensure more student housing and allowing students to stay and work. National co-ordination is required.

Even if the government decides to postpone the introduction of tuition fees for students from outside Europe a clear strategy is needed. We firmly believe that attracting students and researchers to Sweden is of vital importance. But in order to succeed and to benefit fully from the potential value, we need a national strategy.

As for recruiting students from South Asia – visit to India and participation in this conference has given me some ideas.

In SIs new strategy we will focus on a smaller number of countries. As for joint international marketing together with universities, we will not be able to promote Sweden in all South Asian countries. We have more or less decided to focus on India. We hope that more scholarships will be available for all students in South Asia. Also individual universities may market themselves in other South Asian countries – eg KTH in Pakistan

The Nordic Centre in Delhi is funded by universities. The purpose is to support Nordic researchers who go to India. It could be useful for promoting the Nordic countries as study destinations. I have regular meetings with Nordic colleagues where we discuss issues like these.

I would like to arrange a meeting with people at universities with knowledge about India, either because of their work or because they have Indian roots.

We expect to do a fair in India next year as well, probably in the autumn. The focus will be on graduate students.

Niklas Tranæus, Svenska institutet/ 2006-11-29