

De-internationalising Danish Higher Education: Re-framing the Discussion

This paper aims to correct some misconceptions about the cost and purpose of international education in Denmark, based on discussions between *Danske Universiteter*, *Dansk Erhverv*, *Dansk Industri*, *Danske Studerendes Fællesråd*, *Dansk Magisterforening* and *Copenhagen Capacity* with Danish academics and students. The sudden wave of closures of English-medium university programmes in 2018 was made without considering the quality and usefulness of the programmes for Danish students and society and the above parties seek to avoid repeating that mistake.

Costs

In gross terms, the cost of 'SU for EU students' is 4% of the total SU budget (520 mil DKK in 2019). In net terms, the cost is half that, as students pay tax on their SU and they repay their SU for any week when they could not work 10-12 hours. SU is used to pay for living expenses and is recycled into the Danish economy. In addition, they pay tax on the salary from their employment, and they bring with them 12-15 years of previous education, which is a "free gift" to Denmark. The Ministry of Higher Education and Science calculates that overall international students, including those who leave on graduation, make a positive contribution of 100-350,000 DKK to the Danish economy. 'SU for EU students' is a small cost outweighed by huge benefits.

Benefits – International Education

Closures of English-medium programmes remove opportunities for high-quality international education for Danish students as well as for fee-paying international students. A carefully designed curriculum, pedagogy and classroom interaction involves all students in a shared exploration of the challenging issues facing Denmark and the world. This not only equips Danish and foreign students to work in Danish companies with a global reach, but enables Denmark to continue 'punching above its weight' on the world stage as Danish graduates of international programmes work in organisations concerned with humanitarian values, development, peace and diplomacy.

Benefits – Economy

Danish industry needs more international graduates, from engineers to those with intercultural skills. In the fierce international competition for highly skilled labour, Danish companies have more success in attracting international graduates from Danish universities as they are already familiar with Danish culture and integrated into Danish scientific and social networks. Cuts to these students damage the economy.

Benefits - Society

Many international graduates seek to make a greater long-term contribution to the Danish society and economy. They encounter hurdles to obtaining relevant student jobs and graduate employment so as to settle here. An alliance of industrial interests, universities and municipalities is working intensely to retain graduates and overcome these impediments to students' staying and working in Denmark – and this is where more political attention is needed.

Conclusion

Danish universities have successfully developed prestigious international programmes over the last 15 years, yet these can be destroyed overnight. Rather than removing opportunities for high-quality education for Danish and international students, the stakeholders in Danish higher education call for renewed attention to ways to retain graduates and enable them to make long-term benefits to the Danish society and economy