

RESEARCH REPORT

Higher Education Admissions and Student Mobility: the ADMIT research project

ADMIT PROJECT TEAM

Introduction

The ADMIT research project was funded by the Research Directorate-General of the European Commission between November 1998 and October 2000. The research, which was concerned with student mobility and higher education admissions, involved five European Union (EU) countries – France, Germany, Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom (see ADMIT, 2001).

The underlying assumption of the research was that student mobility and accompanying academic recognition are necessary prerequisites for an open and dynamic European educational area that will aid European integration and labour market mobility. However, for students to be mobile they have to have access to higher education and the financial resources to enable them to study abroad. Hence, the overall aim of this research project was to explore the relationship between higher education admissions and student mobility within the EU. The overarching objective of the project was to shed light on higher education admissions policies and practices at national and university levels and to relate these to student mobility.

The specific objectives of the research were as follows.

To compare policies and statistical data at a European and national level that relate to higher education admissions and the mobility of students across the EU.

To compare the development and recent changes to higher education admissions policies and practices at a national and university level. What are current policies and practices in relation to academic recognition? To what extent do philosophies of democratisation and marketisation prevail and what changes are taking place?

To explore the characteristics of students who choose to study outside their own country, and to explore the reasons why they choose to undertake study abroad together with perceived costs and benefits.

To examine whether there are specific needs for common curriculum elements in upper secondary general education and in first degree courses that would facilitate student mobility.

To examine the obstacles and barriers to transnational mobility and the ways in which mobility of students could be increased and facilitated across the countries of the EU.

Methods

For each country, a review of the literature relating to student mobility and admissions to higher education was carried out. We also examined conceptual issues relating to student mobility and admissions. Each research team examined legislative and policy documents and scrutinised statistical data. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with policy-makers and others to shed further light on policy at a national level. Case studies of higher education institutions were carried out in all five countries. The number of case studies carried out by the partners varied; three were carried out in Sweden and the United Kingdom, five in Greece, six in France and seven in Germany. This variation reflects differing national contexts and decisions taken in relation to the balance between diversity and detail necessary to meet the project objectives. A wide range of research methods was adopted to examine students' perspectives. In two cases (France and Greece), qualitative methods were used, with a wealth of data having been collected and analysed. In two cases (Germany and the United Kingdom), quantitative methods were used, with secondary data analysis being undertaken in the case of Germany and primary data collection being undertaken in the United Kingdom. In one case (Sweden), secondary analysis of a wide range of research carried out in Sweden was undertaken.

It is important to note that for this part of the ADMIT project, different research questions were asked as a result of the differing national contexts, data availability and so on. One of the results of this is that it is not possible to do justice to the research that has been carried out in a summary report and the reader is referred to the full reports for each country (ADMIT, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

Previous Research

In all five countries, some research has been carried out relating to the issue of student mobility. However, with the exception of studies carried out in Germany and Sweden, most of the research has been relatively small-scale and focusing on inward and outward mobility in relation to specific countries. There is thus a paucity of research on student mobility, although at an

individual country level there is variation in terms of how well developed the research base is. Overall, there was found to be a lack of information about the characteristics of EU students who study in other EU member states, their reasons for study overseas and the barriers that they confront. The most extensive research on EU mobility has been carried out under the auspices of the ERASMUS (European Action Scheme for the Mobility of European Students) programme. Whilst this provides valuable insights into student mobility, it does not address self-organised student mobility.

Legislation and Policies on Admissions and Mobility

Each country has differing policies towards both student mobility and admissions, notwithstanding EU legal obligations not to discriminate against citizens of other EU countries. Whilst the focus of the ADMIT project was on mobility within the EU, emphasis within most of the countries is increasingly directed towards mobility outside the EU, and especially in the three largest countries (Germany, France and Britain), on inward mobility. Policy developments in a number of countries are also moving in the direction of increasing internationalisation.

In four of the five countries there is a body of legislation that relates to admissions to higher education. The United Kingdom is the exception. Nevertheless, in all countries, there are general policies that relate to higher education admissions. The level of responsibility in relation to university admissions rests with different bodies in the countries concerned. In terms of admissions, the focus of the ADMIT project was on admission to full degree courses and not on periods of study abroad that are frequently organised under the auspices of international or inter-institutional cooperation.

One of the most important issues in the context of admissions to university is the method used to control the number of students entering higher education institutions. Very different models emerge in the five countries; nevertheless, there are some similarities. The similarity relates to the setting of quotas in certain disciplines. (In all countries except the United Kingdom this is known as *numerus clausus* – in Britain this term is not used.) Controls of this type vary between countries.

At postgraduate level, there is similarity between countries as far as admissions are concerned, with decisions invariably being taken at the level of the university or department.

No tuition fees are payable in Germany although there are exceptions. In Sweden, there are no fees at present although there is an ongoing debate about tuition fees for foreign students. In Greece, students in traditional study programmes do not pay tuition fees. In France, low levels of fees are payable. In the United Kingdom, undergraduate students at the time the research was carried out were required to contribute up to £1025 per year towards the cost of their tuition, depending on their own, their parents' or

their spouse's income. United Kingdom and EU students from poorer families have some or all of their fees paid for them by the state.

Mobile students can be defined as those who study abroad for either a degree or for a period of time. The mobility can be organised by another body or by the student him or herself (self-organised or 'free-movers'). In some countries, the concept of 'nationality' is of key importance in terms of defining who are mobile students, whilst in others, the overriding concern is that of 'domicile' or 'residence'. These are fundamental differences and are reflected in national and EU-wide statistics, which are collected at a national level using different definitions (and different methods). This makes even basic comparisons between countries problematic. Another 'grey' area, particularly in relation to statistical information, relates to the category of mobility – whether the student is studying for a full degree or studying abroad for a period of time. At present, it is not possible to make comparisons between countries in terms of the type of mobility.

Because of the conceptual difficulties, it is important that international statistics are treated with caution. There are enormous problems with comparability of national statistical information, with varying definitions being used – for example, 'foreign' students, 'citizens', 'home' and 'overseas' students. These differences that are apparent at a national level are then replicated in EU-wide statistics that draw on national statistics.

There is a continuum in terms of national policy relating to student mobility, ranging from a focus on inward to a focus on outward mobility. Policy in both France and Britain is focused on inward mobility, especially of non-EU students. Both are marketing their higher education systems in a global context and the strategies adopted appear similar in terms of collaboration between key ministries. Their reasons appear to be broadly similar and designed to maximise economic, political and cultural influence. In Germany too, there are elements of this approach, but outward mobility of German students is also promoted. In Sweden, policy focuses on both outward and inward student mobility and in contrast to France, Britain and Germany, stresses mobility as a means of trying to ensure international understanding and peace. Moreover, 'internationalisation' appears to have a higher political profile than in the other ADMIT countries. Greece, at the other end of the spectrum, has a long history of outwardly mobile students, although current reforms may herald changes as the supply of places in higher education expands to meet demand. Moreover, Greek policy focuses mainly on the mobility of Greeks living abroad and aims to facilitate their return to the country of origin by providing special admissions processes.

Coherence of Policy on Student Mobility

For the various types of student mobility identified, there is variation in terms of whether there is in fact a policy, and at which level – supranational or national – policy exists. At the European level, there are policies relating to

student exchanges (under the ERASMUS, LEONARDO and TEMPUS [Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies] programmes). In addition, European law requires that there is no discrimination between admission of students with European citizenship to universities/higher education institutions in other EU countries. Thus, the European focus is on exchanges and the legal context of admissions. At a national level, the situation is different in that each member state has its own policy focus, which may be on inward or outward mobility, or possibly both. However, there are a number of gaps in terms of policy – for example, there is no EU-wide policy relating to self-organised mobility. In some countries, at a national level, policy only relates to outward or inward mobility and not to both. A further issue of policy relevance is that of admission of non-EU citizens living in EU countries to higher education institutions. In some countries, the admission of non-EU citizens (normally resident in another EU country) is a ‘grey’ area of policy.

Education Reforms

Within the countries involved in ADMIT, various reforms have taken place that impact on higher education admissions and student mobility. In addition, there has been a debate about the structure of degree courses in the EU. The Sorbonne declaration has been the subject of much debate at a national and European level. It is clear that a number of the countries involved in ADMIT have considered the structure of degree courses and issues of comparability.

In the context of a global higher education market, the changing policies and practices at university level are interesting – particularly the increasing use of English as a teaching medium in higher education, whilst still respecting intercultural diversity. In France, Germany and Sweden, internationalisation can be seen as involving changes within higher education institutions to meet the changing needs of the student population. In the United Kingdom, evidence of moves in this direction is limited at the level of national policy.

Case Studies of Higher Education Institutions

Case studies were carried out in all five countries participating in the ADMIT project. In the higher education institutions studied, a range of activities concerned with student mobility was under way. These were varied and related to a number of different factors – the national context, the type of institution and its status, the geographical location of the university, fields of study, the demand for places, and so on.

It was not possible to focus solely on intra-EU student mobility, as this alone would not have provided a true reflection of current policy and practice. In all countries participating in ADMIT, student mobility was found to be part of a larger process of internationalisation, and incoming and outgoing mobility are dependent on a range of historical and political factors.

Student mobility includes both inward and outward mobility, with students being mobile within the context of exchange programmes such as ERASMUS and as free-movers. In all countries, exchanges under the ERASMUS programme were evident. However, there was variation in the extent to which agreements had been made with other institutions. In certain institutions there was some antipathy towards the programme.

Variation between Countries

In Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom, the need to recruit 'free-moving' students was a factor that affected university policy and practice. In Germany, for example, a decline in student numbers in some disciplines – physics, chemistry, engineering – together with a reduction in students from traditional 'sending' countries has meant that universities are keen to recruit students from elsewhere (mainly the countries of central and eastern Europe) to maintain their viability. In Sweden, the same phenomenon was observed in some cases. In the United Kingdom, the policy context is very different, with funding depending to a large extent on the numbers of students recruited, but here again the same phenomenon is observed, with certain universities recruiting students from outside the United Kingdom (particularly, but not only, outside the EU) so as not to lose funding – in essence, to ensure their survival.

In France, where there is, as in the United Kingdom, limited outward mobility, the policies of one prestigious institution teaching commerce are of interest in that all students are required to spend a period of study abroad. A similar situation arises in the United Kingdom with students studying for a first degree in languages, with the ERASMUS programme as the vehicle for the period of study abroad.

In Greece, the situation is completely different as there are high numbers of outwardly mobile students who study for a full degree outside Greece. Nevertheless, the ERASMUS student exchange programmes and other EU programmes, together with an 'internationalised' teaching staff, have provided an incentive for innovative agreements with other higher education institutions outside Greece. The ERASMUS programme appears to be particularly important in relation to outgoing mobility, not only in France, Greece and the United Kingdom, but also in some German universities.

The type of mobility varied between countries. In France and in Greece, the focus was on mobility as part of exchange programmes. In Germany and Sweden, there was a focus on both exchange students and free-movers (studying for a full degree). In the United Kingdom, exchange programmes had a relatively low profile, although for undergraduate language students this was not the case (it is a requirement that a period of time is spent abroad for such students); in contrast, a high profile was given to recruiting or selecting full degree students.

It is also important to note that incoming mobility had a high profile in French universities, in the United Kingdom and to some extent in Germany and Sweden. In Greece, in the context of exchange programmes, outgoing mobility used to have a higher profile than incoming mobility. Presently, incoming and outgoing mobility tend to be balanced. Interestingly, in the case of one of the French elite *grandes écoles*, referred to earlier, the majority of outgoing students study in North America. Incoming mobility, on the other hand, involves students from North Africa and other countries with historical and linguistic links with France.

In terms of specific activities and innovations, two main strands were evident, student mobility agreements (which may be linked with teaching innovations) and programmes of European/international research (e.g. Germany, Greece, United Kingdom). Within these strands, a range of innovations was highlighted:

- compulsory foreign language elements in courses;
- new degree courses/international courses (e.g. in Germany, Greece, Sweden);
- new European dimension introduced into courses (e.g. in one Greek university);
- language courses in the official language of the country;
- language courses in other languages;
- teaching in languages other than an official language of the country;
- induction/orientation courses for students new to the country; and
- ongoing cultural/social programmes throughout the period of study.

A number of issues emerged during the interviews in the universities. These included:

- many outgoing students wish to study in English-speaking universities;
- there is variation between disciplines in the extent to which they are interested in internationalisation and mobility;
- in many countries, universities are marketing their courses overseas (e.g. Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom);
- an imbalance of outgoing/incoming students exists (e.g. France, Sweden, United Kingdom).

In general, a small number of staff are involved with the administration of students' mobility. The new centralising changes required by the EU to ERASMUS exchange programmes were generally not popular amongst our respondents, with two countries in particular expressing criticism of centralisation and low levels of funding (Greece and the United Kingdom).

The most important aspect of mobility programmes was reported to be the enthusiasm and interest of individual teachers – on whom these programmes depend. Levels of involvement varied for incoming/outgoing students. Whilst support programmes of one kind or another were in place for all incoming students in all countries, the formal support available from staff

for potential outgoing students varied considerably, with fairly good levels of support reported in Sweden to low levels of support in the United Kingdom.

Incentives and Support Mechanisms

Incentives to participate in mobility programmes fell into two main categories. On the one hand, there were what we have called 'intellectual' incentives and, on the other, financial incentives. 'Intellectual' incentives or motivations were concerned with improving the reputation of the university, faculty or department and improving research and teaching.

Financial incentives to encourage mobility/internationalisation included attracting funds for research and the absence of tuition fees in all countries except the United Kingdom. More explicit incentives included funds to encourage mobility (in some universities in France, Germany, Greece) and other sources, including scholarships and awards (in some universities in Sweden and the United Kingdom), together with additional funds to faculty for each foreign student enrolled (Germany) and portable loans and grants for students from their home country (Sweden and in some instances the United Kingdom).

Different types of support mechanisms were reported, including information, language courses for incoming students, language preparation for study abroad, help with, or, in some universities, a guaranteed offer of accommodation (France, United Kingdom), cultural and social events for incoming students in most countries (Germany, Greece, Sweden, United Kingdom) and feedback sessions/meetings with returning students (Sweden).

Obstacles

In terms of obstacles, the need for common curriculum elements only emerged as an issue in most countries in relation to language proficiency. Indeed, the recurring obstacle reported was a language deficit. The most commonly taught language in the EU is English (apart from in Ireland and the United Kingdom, where it is French), and in almost all of the countries involved in the ADMIT project, outgoing students were reported to want to study in the United Kingdom or an English-speaking country/institution, or on an English-speaking course. However, notwithstanding these barriers, the importance of English in relation to student mobility cannot be overestimated.

Credit transfer systems were perceived by universities in some countries (e.g. Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom) to facilitate mobility among students.

Material and financial obstacles to mobility were highlighted in some countries. One interesting example relates to the situation in France, where there was variation between French institutions in terms of the support provided at the level of the region or *département*. In the United Kingdom, other material constraints on mobility at university level were a natural limit

to expansion. In one case, the university could not take more incoming students. On the positive side, however, some universities were able to offer limited financial incentives to students, which took the form of special funds and scholarships. In Greece, two universities reported using part of their research budget to make supplementary awards to students, particularly at postgraduate level. In the United Kingdom, where scholarships and awards were mentioned, these were mainly, but not exclusively, available to non-EU students.

In some higher education institutions, there appeared to be a lack of enthusiasm for mobility. This was found in relation to teachers in French universities (and was reported to be the case with students too), but interestingly, not in one of the *grandes écoles*. In some institutions in other countries, there also appeared to be a lack of interest, particularly the more prestigious. However, caution is needed in interpreting such findings as in some cases, in spite of a lack of interest at the university level, there is an interest at a faculty or departmental level, especially in the less prestigious fields of study within the university.

A range of other obstacles was highlighted, including recognition of coursework. Studying abroad was sometimes felt to be like a 'tourist activity'; work at international level was not recognised or valued; there can be difficulties with employment contracts for foreign students; there may be a lack of resources; there may be a lack of central support and lack of information for students. In addition, the fact that for only a few courses is study abroad obligatory was another obstacle, as was the lack of incentives for staff, and time constraints (the ERASMUS programme, for example, takes a lot of time to prepare for and manage and exchanges require a lot of work and effort). Two other obstacles were highlighted: the lack of opportunity for prospective students to hear about the advantages/positive experiences of studying abroad from returning students; and programme anxieties, i.e. concerns that time spent abroad would have a negative impact on grades/results.

Benefits of Mobility

A number of benefits were highlighted in the higher education institutions that were studied. These included improvement in the quality of teaching and research, and cultural and professional enrichment of individuals. Regarding the former benefit, it was thought by several universities in France, Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom that there were positive advantages to reciprocity with other universities, such as shared resources, ability to attract high quality students and teachers and to forge beneficial research links and collaborations. Regarding the latter, incoming students were thought to have a good influence on and help raise the standards and aspirations of home students, and introduce fresh thinking, new perspectives (Germany, Sweden,

United Kingdom). On the cost side, the increased costs incurred by institutions under the ERASMUS programme were highlighted.

Student Perspectives

France

In the qualitative research carried out by the French team, it was found that the incoming and outgoing students were predominantly studying languages or social sciences; more were female, with the ERASMUS programme acting 'as a motor for European student mobility'; and students were from modest family backgrounds but probably more outward-looking than others. The concept of 'mobility capital' – comprising personal and family history, previous experiences of overseas mobility, linked to linguistic competence, adaptive experiences and specific personality traits – was used. The students interviewed had mixed mobility capital – some were from dual-culture families, with experience of living and travelling abroad, for example. Others were from families that had not travelled much and only spoke one foreign language.

Students' motivations for studying abroad tended to focus on the fact that it had 'always' been their intention to study abroad, although for some it was necessary for their course. The motives given included language, cultural experiences and personal development. All the students mentioned language and this was also the most important motivation. The choice of country or institution was essentially a linguistic choice, sometimes with a professional project and/or personal reasons. As a result of the dominance of the 'major languages', notably English, the United Kingdom has a natural advantage over other European countries. Choice of institution was largely dependent on partner institutions.

The number of languages in which students were proficient varied according to whether they were linguists or not. Two or three languages plus the mother tongue was the norm for language students compared with one or possibly two plus the mother tongue for those who were studying other subjects. Notwithstanding this finding, the situation at one of the *grandes écoles* was different, with a higher priority given to language learning during the course.

The main source of information before students went abroad was from international offices, which used a range of different strategies, such as meetings, contact with former ERASMUS students, use of the Internet, brochures etc. One of the *grandes écoles* involved in the research had high levels of staffing and a dedicated building for international relations, but this was not typical of a typical French university. Interestingly, although the initial support seemed generally satisfactory for the French case study institutions, this was not always the case in relation to the foreign universities mentioned by students interviewed.

All students who were interviewed were in need of money in addition to that provided by the ERASMUS grant. In many cases, students' parents provided these additional resources, whilst in others, a number of students worked to finance their period of study abroad, either during the preceding holidays or all the previous year. The ERASMUS grants were not able to cover the costs of studying abroad.

The obstacles identified included principally material or practical difficulties – such as linguistic, academic or sociocultural problems. The material difficulties were essentially about financing, administrative matters in relation to the institutions, and finally, difficulties with accommodation. Interestingly, no student spoke in terms of a real cultural 'shock', although they spoke of 'surprises' or 'discoveries'.

The students questioned were positive but prudent when asked to what extent they felt that they had become integrated into the social life of the community. Their activities centred on student life. One of the reasons mentioned for not participating more related to their financial situation and costs such as travel to big cities.

Students were asked to rate how satisfied they were with their period of study abroad. They gave a very high rating to this question. Positive experiences were such that over two-thirds of students would have wished to extend their period of study abroad. One of the benefits of studying abroad was the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Some students were satisfied with the system, but others were not. Problems cited included a lack of clarity with the system and lack of knowledge about the workings of the examination system in France.

Germany

A number of large-scale quantitative research studies relating to student mobility have been carried out by Hochschul-Informationssystem (HIS). Data from one such survey of German students enabled secondary analysis to be carried out with a view to assessing the influence of several factors on the cross-border mobility of students and to get a better understanding of their relative strength and the interaction between the factors. A statistical model was developed to evaluate the impact of different factors on the cross-border mobility of German students. Different influencing factors, ranging from study-related to biographical factors, were taken into account. A further goal was to compare different groups of students (e.g. differentiated by course of study or preferred region for a period of study abroad) with regard to the relevance of different influences. In order to determine the interplay of these factors and their relative strength, a multiple regression with latent variables was conducted. The regression model was calculated for all students as well as for several selected study programmes.

The most influential factor was found to be the reported relevance of studies in other countries for the progress in the study programme at home.

This means that if students believe that their own studies will benefit from studying in another country, they are more likely to go abroad.

The second most influential factor was skill in English language. These two factors were followed by competence in the second language on the one hand, and by the reported professional relevance in the later occupational activity of experience abroad on the other.

These most important factors were closely followed by a second group of three factors with a noticeable, but slightly less prominent, influence. Of these, the economic situation of the students had a slightly stronger influence than the other two, which were the achievement orientation of the students and personal commitments at home.

Even less discriminating than these factors but still representing an influence were barriers in the organisation of the stay abroad, such as finding accommodation and knowledge of the foreign education system (which had a negative influence). The two remaining factors, extroversion and non-study-related experience abroad, had a negligible effect in the overall model.

In short, the most important factors influencing the cross-border mobility of German students were the benefits of studying abroad for students' studies at home, the reported relevance for their later profession, and language skills. If a higher rate of cross-border mobility is desired, the most important thing seems to be to emphasise the benefits from studying abroad more strongly. Also, further promotion of language skills is advisable.

Greece

The research carried out by the Greek team revealed that internationalisation and educational mobility can be seen as shaped by first, the policies adopted, supported or promoted by a variety of institutional actors, such as the EU, member states, higher education institutions, departments and academics; and, second, the students' response to these policies, shaped by their plans for their integration in society. The patterns of educational mobility that emerged can be understood as a result of the interplay between this multitude of institutional policies that set the stage for student action, and the perceptions, intentions and plans of the students, which are shaped in relation to their social status and their aspirations towards upward mobility.

Students seemed to value and pursue educational mobility for three main reasons. First, educational mobility was seen to be a path leading to upward social mobility. Second, students seemed to view educational mobility as a way to acquire specific scientific skills. Third, students appreciated the social and cultural experience accrued through educational mobility. The first of the three factors seemed to be important and present even when the other two appeared (see ADMIT, 2000b). All interviews with students seemed to indicate that a series of sometimes vague but real hierarchies exists. Student satisfaction from the mobility experience can be understood as the result of the interplay between the positioning of the home and host countries in the international

sphere (centre–periphery), the positioning of the home and host education systems in the particular field of study in the international sphere, the positioning and the prestige of the host institution and/or department in which they study within the hierarchy of institutions and fields of study, and the student’s positioning in the social hierarchy, i.e. their social status and family background.

It seemed that reasons to study in Greece varied according to the country of origin. The majority of undergraduate and postgraduate foreign full-course students in Greece were from outside the EU. Students from other EU countries appeared to prefer (organised) mobility to a Greek institution for a period of time that would provide them with scientific training and skills to enhance their career prospects. In the hierarchy of educational systems, the positioning of the Greek system seems to be somewhere in the middle, following those considered top educational systems. On the whole, the level of studies in Greece was judged very good or satisfactory, although inferior to the level of studies in some countries (i.e. the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the USA). However, studies in some prestigious, high-demand fields of study were considered of high academic standing. Students’ evaluation of educational mobility can be understood in relation to their future plans and aspirations, their own family background and social status, and the prestige of the field of study and/or department in the university hierarchy.

The Greek team also examined the outward mobility from Greece to the United Kingdom and according to their conceptual framework of the interplay of hierarchies, the pattern of (outward) mobility from Greece to the United Kingdom can be understood as a result of the interplay of the existence of *numerus clausus* in the Greek education system, which denies access to higher education to a large number of de facto high ability candidates, and the existence of an education system in the United Kingdom which is promoting extensive policies for the attraction of foreign students. This was coupled with a perception on the part of the students that they would eventually ensure a position in their chosen field of study, the prestige of the British institution(s)/department(s), and the social status and the professional and social aspirations of the students.

The interviews indicated that most outgoing students decided to pursue undergraduate studies in the United Kingdom when they failed the Panhellenic examinations. The decision to study in the United Kingdom did not seem to be based on a perception of the Greek education system as of lower status than the British one. In contrast, outward educational mobility from Greece seemed to be related to the role of the education system in the reproduction of the social stratification in Greek society and the extremely high social demand for university education.

Educational mobility towards the United Kingdom at the postgraduate level can be seen as related to postgraduate programmes in Greece being considered highly competitive. It appeared that such a practice functions in a way similar to the *numerus clausus* (at the undergraduate level). The choice of

country appeared to be based on a perception of the United Kingdom as a country which possesses an extended and efficient education system where students get, on the whole, good quality education. The mobility of Greek students towards the United Kingdom seemed to be related to the fact that in the United Kingdom education system, students who have failed the Panhellenic examinations will eventually find an institution that will grant them a position for studies in their desired field of study, their wish to acquire fluency in English, the marketing activities in Greece undertaken on the part of the United Kingdom to attract foreign students, and the fact that Greeks are very well informed on studying opportunities in the United Kingdom. The situation at the postgraduate level was slightly different. Students opted for master's level studies in the United Kingdom as they considered master's programmes in the United Kingdom more specialised and focused as well as better administered than some Greek postgraduate programmes. The interviews seemed to suggest that a hierarchy of institutions and departments exists in the United Kingdom, possibly more defined than in Greece. This was indicated by the fact that choice of institution at the undergraduate level appeared to be guided, first, by the entry requirements and the standards set by the institution.

The social status of the students seemed to be related to the evaluation of their mobility experience. Students of high-status family background or students who obtained their first degrees in high-status departments/fields of study in Greece were found to be more critical of the level of studies in the United Kingdom, even at the most prestigious British institutions. Mobile students who either had no experience of the Greek education system or had studied at low-status Greek departments and/or fields of study, appeared to appreciate the better facilities offered by British institutions. They also seemed to value certain traits of the Anglo-Saxon system, as, for example, the close tutoring and supervision of students. Some of them pointed out several 'differences of style' between the Greek and the British education systems. It appeared that these mobile students associated upward mobility with educational qualifications. They valued postgraduate studies, as they believed that the degrees would enhance job opportunities, their future professional careers and therefore would lead to further upward social mobility. Outwardly mobile students were found to pursue educational mobility and get satisfaction from it when it related to their goals and aspirations for upward mobility and provided them with specific scientific training and/or social experience.

Sweden

As a result of the secondary analysis of data relating to incoming and outgoing students, the Swedish researchers noted that the great majority had had very positive experiences. Personal experiences from the new situations encountered included mixing with people from different cultural backgrounds,

new perspectives widening students' horizons, independence and new responsibilities. These learning processes could all contribute to personal development and competence enhancement in networking and communication skills. Many students made such observations.

The EU students did not always see the benefits of their studies, whether in terms of subject knowledge or in terms of being of use in the labour market, but students from the Baltic States invested much hope and belief in their study period abroad and some reported on positive changes that had already taken place. The differences between the groups were marked. One factor explaining the differences might be that they felt needed in their home countries. They often expressed a positive view of the future and that they are part of the realisation of this future.

There was some dissatisfaction among students concerning the process of finding the appropriate course at the appropriate level. The formal results of studies, i.e. grades, course content or subject knowledge, may not be the most important benefits of student mobility. The competencies needed today are often expressed in terms of social and cultural competence, language knowledge, communication skills, leadership, flexibility, adaptability, independence, responsibility, coping with stress etc., and there are reasons to believe that many of these skills may be more successfully acquired in an unknown environment than at home.

When it comes to the Swedish students' expectations concerning the value of their foreign studies as an advantage in the labour market, Swedish research indicates that employers seldom explicitly required studies abroad for employment, even if they valued foreign studies as being of extra merit.

Language problems were not found to be the most serious ones for incoming students to Sweden – they managed by using English, or knew Swedish in the case of some Finnish students – nor for outgoing Swedish students. Outgoing Swedish students are well prepared in foreign languages by the school system, especially English, but also to some degree German, Spanish and French. In addition, they can take courses in another Nordic language (Danish or Norwegian). Second generation immigrants, trained at school in their mother tongue, are a growing group among mobile students. Swedish higher education institutions have adopted a policy which has allowed for the increase in exchanges, namely, the expansion of courses in English. But the comments of some students indicated that there was among the incoming students also an interest to learn the Swedish language in order to come closer to the Swedes and to the Swedish culture.

The ADMIT interviews with academics and others at university level indicated that Swedish students wished to go to English-speaking countries in and outside Europe, and that efforts to create exchanges were concentrated on such countries. However, in the analysis of other research material, no similar evidence emerged.

Both incoming and outgoing students, with the exception of the grant holders from the Baltic countries, mentioned economic barriers. The fact that

the Swedes have 'portable' grants and loans may explain the interest in exchange activity. But once in the host country, the Swedish student is in a situation that is comparable to other exchange students, with no parental support. For the student, living costs tend to be higher abroad, but according to results reported by the Swedish team, almost all mobile students seemed to enjoy the experience abroad and found it worthwhile.

United Kingdom

The quantitative research carried out by the United Kingdom team involved developing a questionnaire for EU (non-United Kingdom) students studying at United Kingdom higher education institutions to complete. Over 500 questionnaires were returned and analysed. The research examined the characteristics of a sample of EU students studying in United Kingdom higher education institutions, their reasons for choosing to study abroad and specifically their reasons for opting for the United Kingdom. The majority of students in the sample were studying for a degree to be awarded in the United Kingdom, although a significant minority were on an ERASMUS exchange.

The majority of students studying for a United Kingdom degree were on undergraduate courses, with significant minorities being on a master's course or on a research degree programme. Students were studying a wide range of subjects: social studies (the most common), sciences, engineering and technology and 'combined' subjects. Students' reasons for choosing to study abroad varied, with the most important reasons relating to increasing their labour market prospects, broadening their horizons and improving their foreign language competence. More males than females gave as important/very important reasons, wanting to improve their chances of getting a good job, the belief that a higher level of English would improve their labour market prospects and wanting to go to an institution with an international reputation.

The most important reasons given for choosing to study in the United Kingdom – and the most frequently mentioned – were that respondents found exactly the course that they wanted, that a degree from the United Kingdom would improve their job prospects and a belief that the quality of United Kingdom higher education institutions would be very good. More males than females gave as very important/important reasons a belief that a degree from the United Kingdom and a higher level of English proficiency would improve their job prospects, wanting to go to an institution with an international reputation and a desire to improve their English. More females, on the other hand, reported that the United Kingdom not being far from their home country was an important reason for choosing to study in the United Kingdom.

A high proportion of students on an ERASMUS exchange were studying for a social studies degree in their home country, with significant minorities studying sciences, business and administration, and languages. The most

important reasons students gave for choosing to study abroad were to improve their foreign language competence, to experience other cultures and to broaden their horizons. A high percentage also felt that studying abroad would improve their job prospects. More females than males cited as important: experiencing other cultures, gaining a different perspective on their subject, and experiencing different teaching and learning methods. Important reasons given by students for choosing the United Kingdom for their period of study abroad related to improving their English, the view that a higher level of English would improve their job prospects and wanting to meet students from many different countries. More females than males gave their interest in British culture as an important reason.

All respondents were asked about the arrangements for funding their studies in the United Kingdom. The student's family was the most frequently mentioned source and also the most frequently mentioned 'main source' of funds. The socio-economic profile of the students revealed that they were, overall, from privileged backgrounds. In over half the cases, the student's father had studied at tertiary level; over half rated their family socio-economic status in their home country as 'above average' or 'high'. Over half spoke four languages (with varying degree of proficiency). The most frequently mentioned individuals exerting a positive influence on the decision to study abroad were the respondent's mother, father and a close friend. There was some evidence to suggest that the students' plans for the future had changed since they had been studying in the United Kingdom.

Obstacles to Mobility and Solutions

Three key barriers common to all countries were identified: language, finance and recognition and/or admissions. Other barriers were also highlighted, including cultural/attitudinal barriers; concern at an institutional level about quality and standards at institutions in other EU countries; and different attitudes towards mobility by more and less prestigious institutions. A range of possible solutions to these barriers were identified.

Language

Develop and reinforce language training, and well before university. Extend the creation of language centres in higher education institutions so that all students benefit from language training that is as varied as possible and at all levels – beginner, intermediate and advanced (recommendations by French team).

Develop obligatory English study courses to accompany higher education programmes; develop specific language courses in languages other than English related to exchange programmes, or out-sourcing of special language programmes (recommendations by German team).

The EU should adopt a more comprehensive policy concerning foreign language instruction, promoting the teaching of widely spoken EU languages in secondary education at the national level. It can be assumed that foreign language proficiency varies by country and, therefore, differential policies would be advisable. At the same time, the Community should support the instruction of less-spoken European languages, to ensure the multicultural character of Europe. Different policies are proposed for the promotion of undergraduate and postgraduate student mobility. At an undergraduate level, a promising course of action would relate the funding of ERASMUS to the development of 'project-based' student exchange schemes, and the funding of mobility schemes could be related to the linguistic preparation of outgoing students in the language of the host country. Instruction of at least some core courses in widely spoken European languages would attract incoming students towards institutions where less-spoken languages prevail. At the postgraduate level, there could be the promotion of joint research projects, coupled with training of students in specific research techniques, as research activities take place without the necessity to specify one language of communication in any particular setting (recommendations by Greek team).

There should be more support for Swedish language courses for incoming students who wish to take courses given in Swedish together with more courses to be offered in English; greater support for the acquisition of second and third foreign languages; training teachers to give courses in English and other foreign languages (recommendations by Swedish team).

Improve the level of foreign language competence among British students via an increased emphasis in upper secondary education, where there is no compulsory foreign language element. Foreign language should be included as a 'key skill' for all such pupils (recommendations by United Kingdom team).

Finance

Develop budgetary allocations at European, national, regional, institutional and departmental level to facilitate mobility (recommendation by French team).

At a national level, financial support for mobility could come from actions aimed at providing incentives for the private or voluntary sectors to invest in student mobility (recommendation by French team).

Develop a fully portable financial support scheme in the EU for students who wish to take a full course in another EU country (recommendation by German team).

Increased funding of student scholarships in order to ensure participation of all students to the schemes (especially students that cannot count on family support) (recommendation by Greek team).

Increased funding of teaching staff mobility targeted to joint teaching and research activities, in order to provide incentives to academics to set mobility schemes (recommendation by Greek team).

Funding of programmes establishing meeting points between research projects and mobility schemes in order to incorporate student mobility in the wider internationalisation activities (and policies) of the universities/departments (recommendation by Greek team).

Provision of differential incentives (i.e. financial support) to foster the participation of less developed universities and/or departments in EU programmes. The development of research infrastructure with emphasis on low (income and) prestige institutions and low (income and) prestige fields of study, such as 'soft sciences' should be a sine qua non policy on the part of the EU (recommendations by Greek team).

Provide additional financial support for high-cost areas, countries or fields of study (recommendation by Swedish team).

Provide more scholarships for incoming students (recommendation by Swedish team).

Provide portable loans for students who wish to study in other EU countries (recommendation by United Kingdom team).

Provide more scholarships to facilitate mobility among outgoing students from lower income families to undertake periods of study abroad and for incoming students from lower income families (recommendation by United Kingdom team).

For admissions: economic compensation for uneven exchange, as happens within the Nordic Agreement, may be considered (recommendation by Swedish team).

Recognition and/or Admissions

Improve the information systems: explain clearly to students the credit transfer system (ECTS) in operation for ERASMUS exchange programmes; revise the university calendars across European universities so that there are more consistent start and end dates for the academic year/semesters/terms (recommendations by French team).

Instigate a centralised body for the recognition of modules or courses, with a 'recognition ombudsman' at each university; give the individual institutions the right to accept the foreign students they want within the total of allowed students (recommendations by German team).

The involvement of academics with exchange schemes appears to be the only way to guarantee their involvement in course recognition and evaluation on a regular basis; differential funding for the development of infrastructure of less developed universities and/or departments in less favoured regions (recommendations from Greek team).

Develop a common (regional) educational space, as between the Nordic countries (recommendation by Swedish team).

Facilitate greater interaction across the EU between those involved in organising exchange programmes and those involved with admissions to ensure greater understanding of issues related to academic standards. Agencies responsible for quality assurance across the EU need to liaise closely with one another. The Sorbonne Declaration provides an ideal context for this to take place (recommendations by United Kingdom team).

Other Incentives to Improve Mobility

Develop a 'reward' system for mobility in the careers of teaching staff (recommendation by French team).

In Sweden, cultural differences were not seen as a barrier, largely as a result of a mentor system having been introduced, which includes social and cultural activities.

In order to encourage mobility to cohesion member states, differentiation of financial support systems might be adopted, with additional support for language preparation (recommendation by German team).

It is necessary to provide academics with incentives to set up mobility schemes. Increased funding of teaching staff mobility appears to be an appropriate incentive (recommendation by Greek team).

Conclusion

In conclusion, by examining a sample of EU countries with differing policies, higher education systems and financial mechanisms, we have been able to show interesting similarities and differences between countries. Unexpected similarities between France and the United Kingdom were found in terms of the overall national policies driving student mobility and the way in which higher education is seen as a tool of foreign policy in both.

Other similarities, which were not predicted at the outset, relate to the ways in which similar outcomes can be achieved with differing incentive structures. Inward student mobility is encouraged in certain disciplines in some universities in Germany and the United Kingdom, but whilst the incentives are financial in the case of the United Kingdom, in the case of Germany – and indeed Sweden – the incentives are for the survival of particular departments within universities. Further interesting similarities relate to the different responses of higher and lower status universities in relation to mobility programmes (cf. Greece and the United Kingdom), with an institution's prestige appearing to have an impact on the organisation's encouragement or otherwise of mobility programmes.

Finally, a key issue that merits a specific mention relates to the way in which differing policies at a national level can impact on mobility – in particular, the fact that Sweden has portable grants and loans means that in theory there are more opportunities for Swedish students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds to study abroad than for students from other

countries. It is hoped that some of the innovative ideas and policy recommendations that we highlight above will be addressed by policy-makers.

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