

LOOKING FUR

Traditionally
a strong magnet
for students from
the European Union,
Denmark is looking
to expand its brand
beyond the EU.

INTERNATIONALIZATION
STRATEGIES



BY DAVID TOBENKIN

Lyngvig lighthouse at
the Danish North Sea coast

SHUTTERSTOCK



THEIR AFIELD

DENMARK, a small, highly developed Scandinavian country, has long enjoyed favor as a destination for other European higher education students, but is redoubling its international student recruitment efforts to try to draw international students from further afield. Increasing the number of international students is hoped to further internationalize its society and higher education institutions.

But it is no easy task to draw more international students who pay the full costs of their higher educations, and a recent Danish government measure that would reduce students' curricula choices could make that effort more difficult still.

International student data from the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science tell the story. From 2008 through 2012, the number of international full-degree students from European countries outside of Scandinavia soared from 4,985 in 2008 to 13,613 in 2012. [Note: the Ministry says these are the latest figures.] Over the same period, the number of non-European international students fell from 3,332 to 2,801.

Developing a Recruitment and Retention Plan

Seeking to address that trend, in April 2014, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science released an Action Plan, *Denmark: an Attractive Study Destination*, aimed at increasing international student enrollment and poststudy residency in the country.

The Action Plan provides for governmental steps to make Danish higher education more attractive to international students, such as the planned introduction of a grant program for talented students from non-European countries, expansion of the studyindenmark.dk website promoting the country's higher education sector, and expansion of a Top Talent program, which has marketed Danish study and career pathways opportunities for Chinese and Brazilian students, to include Indian students.

A second component of the Action Plan is aimed at retaining international students in the country. Such steps include giving international students more and better guidance on job and career prospects in Denmark, enabling international students to get relevant student jobs and work experience placements while studying, and creation of an establishment pass that will give graduates with a master's degree or a PhD from a Danish study program access to work in Denmark for two years with no requirements as to income level. It also offers them the opportunity to start their own business.

Most of the steps were introduced in legislation in late 2014 that is expected to pass in early 2015. The Action Plan comes in response to governmental recognition that while Danish higher education institutions are strong magnets for students from elsewhere in the European Union (EU), Denmark has faced tougher going recruiting farther afield. The Action Plan states that fewer and fewer young people from countries outside Europe are choosing to study in Denmark and that their

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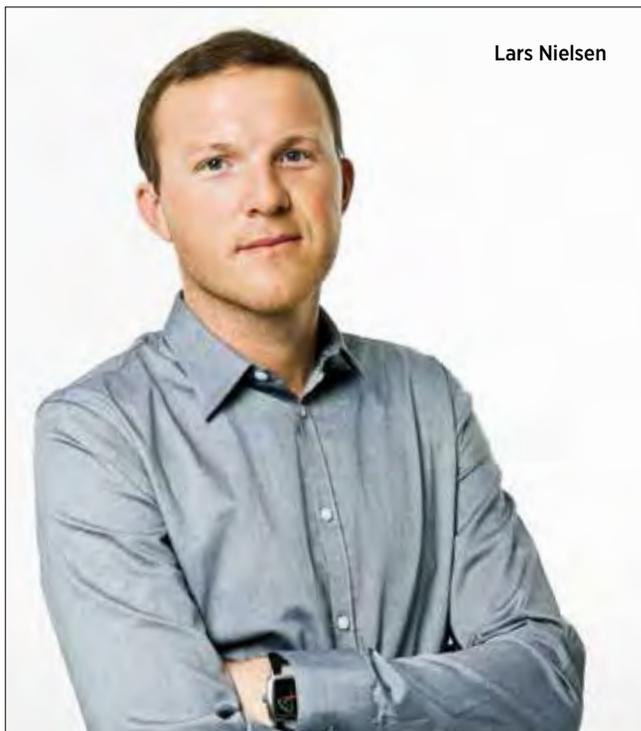


inclusion is important to internationalization efforts.

“First and foremost, an international study environment is essential for enhancing learning outcomes for students at Danish higher education institutions,” says Lars Beer Nielsen, head of division at the Ministry of Higher Education and Science’s Centre for Policy on Higher Education. “Attracting international students, not least from the non-EU countries, will help us reach that goal. Retaining them at least for a period of time will help make this a good investment, too. Why I think the whole [Action Plan] will have an impact is not because of some of the more high-profiled initiatives, but because of the plan’s dual focus on attracting and retaining international students in combination with the government’s broader recruitment reform. The two reforms together are sending the signal that a huge majority in the Danish Parliament will pass legislation making Denmark a country much more open to foreigners who wants to study or work here.”

Helping Students Integrate

Despite Denmark’s status as a developed country with a high standard of living, it has not always been easy for international students to integrate into its society. “Inte-



Lars Nielsen



Anita Damsgaard Jensen

grating into Danish society has proven to be a challenge for some international students,” says Anita Damsgaard Jensen, chief adviser at the Centre for Policy on Higher Education. “That is why the Action Plan is emphasizing the importance of welcoming, integration, and guiding international students—if the students integrate into the society, the likelihood of them staying in the country after graduation is much better.”

“We are positive toward the Action Plan,” says Kristian Thorn, deputy university director of Denmark’s Aarhus University. “The fact that we have the

ministry [of Higher Education and Science] pushing internationalization at the level of government policy is a new thing. We would like them to sustain this support as well through funding and the removal of existing legal barriers. It is important that they continue this endeavor.”

Some Recent Legislation May Be Counterproductive

But in September 2014, the Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science, Sofie Carsten Nielsen, announced a controversial new policy that would reduce the number of higher education student places in higher education programs whose graduates have historically experienced high unemployment rates. The policy will reduce higher education graduates in those programs by roughly 30 percent over the subsequent 4 years, from 15,000 students to 11,000 students, says Anja Janum, a senior adviser at the Centre for Policy on Higher Education, who noted that higher education institutions have been encouraged to increase intake into study programs with comparatively low unemployment rates.

Some Danish university leaders say that the new policy could fall particularly hard on international students by reducing institutions’ flexibility to respond to their preferences and needs.

“The recent political development in Denmark, where the minister wants to place a cap on the intake of students in a number of specific fields of study, has given us concern regarding the recruitment of international students,” says Trine Sand, director of the International Education and Grants Office at the University of Copenhagen. “We are not yet certain of what the final picture will look like in all its details. However, we are certain that the cap will not affect all programs. It is a cap that will be placed on



International students receiving guidance from staff in the University of Copenhagen Student Centre upon arrival

programs where graduates may have found it harder to find employment. We will continue to have a number of programs without caps, particularly in the sciences and health sciences, and in regards to programs with a cap the minister has promised us that there will still be room for an intake of international students.”

A large cause of the drop in non-EU students attending Danish higher education institutions in recent years is that prior to 2006, Denmark charged the same amount for higher education of international students as it did for EU and Denmark students, namely nothing. Thorn says fees for undergraduate international students at his institution now vary from \$20,000 per year for programs in hard sciences or medicine that have high lab fees to \$10,000 per year for other subjects like political science.

Stepping Up the Game

At Aarhus University, Thorn says that the race to compete for more international students has meant stepping up its game at a number of levels. “You need to have high-quality services and over the last 4 or 5 years, we have improved the quality of our basic services, such as housing and student support,” Thorn says. “It also means streamlining recruitment. When you take too much time processing an application, you find competitors are quicker to process them. In some cases, when we got back to students, they had already accepted somewhere. So we have worked on expediting our admissions process.”

The number of international full-degree students at Aarhus University has risen from 2,047 in 2007 to 3,279 in 2013, and the number of international PhD students has risen from 191 to 525 over the same period. During the same time frame, the total number of students grew from 29,550 to 38,169. An Aarhus University internationalization report states that the university will improve the quality of education by embedding an international dimension in its curriculum through the use of methodology, perspectives, cases, and examples.



Trine Sand

As with the Action Plan, a large focus at Aarhus University is English language competency. The university plans to further increase the supply of master’s and undergraduate-level programs provided in English, according to the internationalization report. Thorn says that the university hopes to go beyond this by seeking to ensure sufficient language competencies among its lecturers and making provisions to provide academic staff with intercultural competencies to teach in an international classroom and in a global context.

Aarhus will also further improve the professional support structure for international full-degree students, according to its internationalization plan, including developing a comprehensive “from admission to employment” support structure targeting the needs of international full-degree students and complementing procedures at the department and faculty level, Thorn says.



Kristian Thorn

Assessing the Competitive Situation

Part of the challenge in developing a recruitment strategy is identifying the competition, says the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences' Jensen. "In general, it is difficult to compete with English-speaking countries—these countries have a natural competitive advantage due to their well-known higher education institutions and the fact that English is the primary language in the world," says Jensen. "Therefore, our primary foreign competitors are perhaps Sweden and the Netherlands, non-English speaking countries that are very active in marketing and recruitment."

And what is the Danish higher education edge? "It is our impression that our higher education institutions put a lot of attention into integrating the international students into the learning environment in order for them to study side-by-side with Danish students, not just in separate classes and programs," says Jensen. "The Danish higher education institutions value that international students bring an international perspective and outlook to the Danish students. That may be more the case than in other countries, where the focus can be on the commercial and financial aspects of international mobility."

"The government also puts a lot of attention on retaining international students in the Danish labor market. The current government has reinforced efforts to recruit high-skilled foreign labor. We are a small country, but with global companies in, for example, the pharmaceutical industry (LeoPharma, Novo Nordisk, Lundbeck), so we need specialists from abroad."

Sharpening Focus

Some Danish universities are reducing the number of partner universities abroad, and focusing on fewer, but better strategic partnerships with high-profile and high-ranked universities abroad.

"The University of Copenhagen has been going through our portfolio of, especially, cooperation within the Erasmus [student mobility] program, and has closed down agreements with no, or very little, mobility," says Sand, the director of the International Education and Grants Office at the University of Copenhagen, which counts among its 2013 student population of 40,866, 1,705 exchange students and 4,032 full-degree students, aside from the count of PhD students. "We have also made a set of criteria for entering into new partnerships to ensure that we only enter into partnerships that are really valuable for us. From 2010 onwards, we have reduced the number of partnership agreements and agreements with no or very little activity have not been renewed. This has resulted in a 30-percent reduction of Erasmus agreements."

Such culling is not expected to result in a reduction in international students, and the university is currently studying the best means of attracting more of them, Sand explains. "University of Copenhagen will focus on attracting more international students, particularly full-degree master's students during the coming years," Sand says. "We engaged Illuminate Consulting Group to conduct an extensive survey of the English language master's programs at the University of Copenhagen to assess the feasibility of attracting more international students into these programs," Sand says. "The report has been delivered and it contains many valuable recommendations on how we can improve in attracting more talented international students to our degree programs. One example is by making our recruitment efforts more coordinated, but there are many others. We are in a process of identifying what action to take based on the recommendations. This is ongoing work, and it is therefore too early to say how we will move forward."

"In addition, we have commenced partnership tours to visit strategic partners where we would like to see a heightened awareness of our university and what we have to offer," Sand says. "These trips have proved very valuable for us. The participants on these tours are a mix of academic and professional staff and senior- and upper-level management who focus on different aspects of internationalization. In recent years we have had visits to our partners in the Boston area, Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Berlin, Delhi, Seoul, and [in spring 2015] we have visits to Brazil and Toronto in the making." **IE**

DAVID TOBENKIN is a freelance reporter based in the Washington, D.C. area. His last article for *IE* was "Setting Goals for Success" about Ireland's international student recruitment efforts, which appeared in the recent supplement on Irish higher education published with the January/February 2015 issue.