

Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES):
Conference on "Cross-Border Education and Development Co-operation"

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It is increasingly recognized that higher education is one key to the sustainable social and economic development of a country. There is also an emerging consensus that cross-border education can be an effective way of creating a win-win situation for universities in the South and the North, if certain challenges are met:

How can higher education systems in developing countries cope with growing demand for higher education and simultaneous decrease of state funding for their institutions? How can they strike the balance between internationalisation and brain drain? How can educational opportunities be diversified? How can academic knowledge be made operational and put to concrete use? These are the challenges that universities in the South have to meet.

At the same time, European universities are undergoing a fundamental reform process. What we call the "Bologna Process" is only part of a far-reaching process of modernisation in education and research at our higher education institutions. On top of comprehensive structural and organisational reforms, universities are internationalising their study programmes and working on international standards in terms of competences and learning outcomes for the different levels of the educational systems.

It so happens that several of the topics we are struggling with in Europe and elsewhere have first been brought up in the context of cross-border education or transnational education: Quality assurance, recognition of study periods or exams abroad, modularisation and transparency as well as selection of students. All these issues have been part of the discussions on cross-border education at UNESCO for several years and are now part of the everyday work of universities. This highlights the innovative impulse and effect of cross-border education. Clearly, transnational study programmes are not a luxury a higher education institution may or may not indulge in, but have become an integral part of higher education development.

Dr Alexander was quite right in dwelling on the wider „philosophical“ or “cultural“ aspects of cross-border education this morning. At the same time, yesterday's workshops and the discussion this morning have shown that there are clearly identifiable and very concrete matters that seem common to most cross-border study programmes. The identification of “good practice“ can be very helpful in the following areas discussed:

- § development of joint curricula;
- § quality assurance;
- § integration of blended learning modules;
- § recognition;
- § funding of cross-border education; and the
- § clarification of the strategic purpose of cross-border programmes.

I think that the conference was a good example of a two-fold approach: mapping the wider context of cross-border education, while not neglecting the nitty-gritty of the daily work. DAAD and HRK will continue their work along the "road map" drafted at the Berlin Conference last year.

In November 2005 the DIES Series will continue with a workshop on how to create incentives for development cooperation within the organisational structures of higher education institutions. HRK and DAAD will invite experts to discuss how development cooperation can be further integrated into the institutional structures of universities and how commitment to development cooperation can be defined as one of the criteria in budget allocation a) from government to university and b) within the university.

Thank you very much for attending the conference and for joining in the discussion yesterday and today. I look forward to seeing you again.