Chapter 4

International Student Mobility: A European Perspective from Germany and the United Kingdom

Christian Bode and Martin Davidson

Introduction

The global financial and economic crisis, the emergence of new economic and political power centers, and the growing awareness of problems and risks such as climate change are transforming the way we see the world. The dominance of the West and its political, military, and cultural influence are gradually giving way to a multi-polar setting of a multicultural and decentralized world that at the same time needs more cooperation, coordination, and common solutions than ever before. Of course, this also has a direct and massive impact on the higher education subsector that not only provides research and technologies for new solutions and economic growth but, more importantly, also educates future world leaders on whom the fate of our global village will depend. There is no doubt that internationalization will play an increasing role in higher education and move from its former peripheral role into the center of institutional and national strategies.

Internationalization in this new sense will go far beyond recruiting international students although students’ (in particular graduates’) mobility will continue to play a major role. Mobility and competitive recruitment of staff will also grow and so will cooperation in thematic and institutional networks, both regional and global. This process includes a
political coordination of higher education policy at different international levels, such as the Bologna Process that would have been unthinkable two decades ago. Insofar as developments in the European Union (EU) are concerned, the Bologna Process—and its interaction with national policies, as illustrated in the case of Germany and the United Kingdom—gives an example of an emerging new pattern of internationalization that may also be instructive for other parts of the world.

Europe

The EU—which started as the European Communities with purely economic agendas such as coal and steel, agriculture, and foreign trade—has grown into a driving force in other areas of policy as well, particularly in research and education. The launchpad for this new dimension was the Lisbon Agenda, which set the EU goal of becoming “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world” by 2010. This goal is unlikely to be achieved but the distance to go has become shorter.

In the area of research and development, European political leaders have set themselves the goal of committing 3 percent of gross domestic product per year. Currently the European average share is still below 2 percent. In Germany, as in the United States, it stands at 2.6 percent, and in the United Kingdom at 1.8 percent (where the government has set a target of 2.5 percent for gross domestic product spend on research by 2014). Investment in the seventh European Union Framework program will grow to €60 billion and will involve various non-European partners. A European Research Council has been established and a European Institute of Technology will follow. All these programs are, by definition, international and will create thousands of new opportunities for doctoral and postdoctoral students. Many of these positions will be filled by non-European candidates.

The developments in European higher education are even more astounding. The Bologna Process was an unprecedented international harmonization of national reform policies in Europe—a process EU member states would have cursed until recently. At celebrations for the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna in 1988 and at the European education ministers’ conference 11 years later, participants elaborated two Bologna Declarations, which could not have been more different. The first, in Latin and signed by hundreds of rectors, presidents, and principals, confirmed the legacy of European universities’ humanist tradition. The other, in English and signed by 30 European ministers of higher education, set political goals to develop a unified European higher education