Foreword

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND LOCAL CHALLENGES SURROUNDING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

The field of internationalization of higher education is broad and varied, with many different components, approaches, strategies and activities. The dominant component of internationalization in higher education is that of ‘internationalization abroad’, which comprises all aspects of mobility of students, scholars, programs, projects and even complete institutions (branch campuses). The other, less mentioned dimension is ‘internationalization at home’, which focuses on the internationalization of the curriculum, teaching and learning, and learning outcomes. The compilation of papers brought together in this publication: Global Perspectives and Local Challenges Surrounding International Student Mobility, is at the crossroad of these two components, ‘abroad’ and ‘at home’, and focuses on international students.

There is interesting debate to be held about what in the current complex global environment is meant by ‘international student’. For instance, is a Malaysian student studying in Malaysia at a branch campus or a franchise operation of an Australian university, a local or an international student? The student is studying towards an international degree, at an international institution, which makes her an international student. However, she is a student in her own country and counted as such in Malaysia’s higher education statistics – which makes her a local student. And if a Malaysian student takes part in a 2+2 twinning program, is that student first a local student and in her last two years an international student? Or if that student took an online degree program of an Australian university, would she count as a local student – given her location – or – given the degree – would she count as an international student?

These questions are not easy to answer and they illustrate that internationalization, in the context of the global knowledge society we live in, has become increasingly more complex. Still, one thing is sure, the number of international students – for short-term credit mobility for a home degree, or for long-term full degree mobility at a university in or from another country – is still growing. There are already around 5 million students studying in another country, or studying in their own country for a degree from a university abroad. This shows that international students are an important factor, for countries, for institutions and for the students themselves. For economic, political, cultural and/or academic reasons, they are an essential part of the current phenomenon of international higher education.

This growing presence of international students, in some countries and institutions already above the 20 percent of the total student body, has many, diverse implications. The papers in this publication address a variety of case studies, experiences, challenges and opportunities resulting from the presence of international students in our countries and institutions. The different sections and papers illustrate
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the diversity of aspects related to the study of international student mobility: migration and mobility; adjustment, adaptation and acculturation; campus support services and legal considerations; as well as academic and social experiences. They also provide an insight from different types of institutions, different countries and different mobility schemes.

The editors are also involved in the Journal of International Students, which attempts to give a more scholarly focus to the broad area of international student mobility. What strikes me, as a scholar and long-term Senior International Officer, who has published already for many years on the subject, is that many of the authors in this publication in the Journal of International Students, including the editors, can be called relatively ‘newcomers’ in the field of internationalization of higher education. They come from other disciplines, they have recently graduated, and/or give a practitioner’s perspective on the study of international student mobility. This is encouraging, as it is important to promote a diversity of perspectives to this study. It is important and valuable to debate international student mobility from a diverse range of professional experiences. The editors have succeeded in bringing new and fresh views to the forefront. I hope that the study and debate about the future of international student mobility will continue, and that the input from this long list of contributors will be used for that purpose.

Hans de Wit
Boston College, USA

Hans de Wit, PhD is Research Professor and Director of the Center for International Higher Education in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. He is also the Founding Editor of the Journal of Studies in International Education (Association for Studies in International Education/SAGE publishers), as well as a founding member and past president of the European Association for International Education (EAIE). He has received several awards for his contribution to the field of international education: EAIE (1999 and 2008), NAFSA (2002), CIEE (2004 and 2006), University of Amsterdam (2006), AIEA (2006 and 2013) and AMPEI (2014). His recent books include Possible Futures: The Next 25 Years of the Internationalisation of Higher Education; An Introduction to Higher Education Internationalisation; and The SAGE Handbook on International Higher Education.