

AAE International students

Introduction

Kungl. Tekniska Högskolan (KTH) has decided to carry out an Administrative Assessment Exercise of the different administrative processes within KTH. One process or area is the work with international students. This report summarises the observations recommendations by the external expert group. The group has been appointed by KTH. Members of the group are:

Karen S. Ali, Eindhoven University of Technology
Mauritz Danielsson, Luleå tekniska universitet
Catharina Fluhr, Delft University of Technology
Marlene van Heusden, Eindhoven University of Technology,
Marie-Louise Isaksson, Karolinska Institutet
Elco van Noort, Delft University of Technology
Richard Stenelo, Lunds universitet
Lennart Ståhle, Chair, TheSwedish National Agency for higher education
Kay Svensson Uppsala University

Meetings

The group has met twice. One introductory meeting was held in December, where an over-all information was given about the assessment and an overview of the university's strategic plan and the work with international students. The second meeting was held in June as a "site visit" where the panel had the possibility to interview staff who work with international students. The panel also met four international students who gave their view of KTH's work with international students. Lennart Ståhle has also taken part of a meeting for the chairs in March.

The Self-evaluation report

The self-evaluation report was distributed to the group in March and was read individually until the site visit in June. Before the start of the site visit the group had an internal meeting discussing the report. The group concluded that the report covers all administrative procedure when it comes to international students. All the procedures are well described and many of them seem to function well. However there was a focus on the work of the central administration and less of the work that was carried out at the schools.

Observations and recommendations

The observations and recommendations from the group do not cover all aspects that have been brought forward in the self-evaluation report. The questions concerning study administration are given less attention because our informants did not have so many comments about this in one sense. We also have the impression that the processes itself were not the problem. The aspects were mentioned but in connection with strategy and management. Because of this questions about strategy and management have the focus in the recommendations below. In a general aspect we lack an over-all clear ownership for the process of internationalization and international students. There are many ambitious persons involved but it is not clear who is responsible and who owns and governs the whole question. It is our opinion that this has to be solved at the highest level of the university. If these questions are solved the processes around international students will run more smoothly .

International strategy

KTH is recommended

To formulate and decide about an international strategy that is accepted and communicated at all levels within the institution.

To explain and communicate the target for fee paying students

To clarify the responsibility of the schools.

During our discussions with representatives from different functions it became obvious that KTH lacks an overall international strategy. When we asked about the international strategy of KTH not anyone could point to a document that states why internationalization is important to KTH, what the international goals are and how they should be reached. No one, except for senior management, could even give the underlying ideas of KTH about internationalization.

KTH needs to formulate and decide about an international strategy. This is a responsibility for the central management and for the governing board. The work to formulate an international strategy has to involve the representatives of the schools where the real internationalization takes place. The strategy has to be a policy paper that states why KTH should have an international profile, how the institution is going to work with international questions and the involvement and responsibilities of different levels. The strategy has to be followed of an action plan with clear targets and methods for follow up activities.

There is a clear quantitative target for fee-paying students that everyone seems to be aware of: 1000 at the year 2016. But why this target is set and how it going to be achieved is not clear for many, especially for the representatives from the schools. They are also unsure how they should act and contribute to the realization of the target.

Organisation and administration

KTH is recommended:

To create clear structure of the central organisation and support for international activities.

To formulate clear mandates (inclusive budget) and instructions for the different actors and groups.

At central level KTH has the International Advisory Group (IAG) which is responsible for the management of international policy and strategic issues. The IAG is led by the Deputy President and has representatives from the schools. The Vice-President for international Affairs, the Senior Advisor International Strategies and representatives of the students are also members of the group.

The impression from our meetings is that the mandate and division of responsibilities of the IAG are unclear. To our knowledge there is no instruction and mandate of the group. It is unclear if the group has a mandate to interfere or direct the international activities of KTH or if it is just a policy group. The Deputy President who chairs the group seems to have an unclear mandate and responsibility and we are not convinced of the division of responsibilities between the Deputy President and the Vice President for international Affairs.

There are many administrative units/groups that are working with internationalization and recruitment of international students. All representatives that we were able to meet are dedicated and hardworking persons but it was not always clear how the mandate and responsibility were divided between the different units and how these groups are anchored in the organization. The names of the groups are not always clear and sometimes confusing.

Our observations are also recognised in the self-evaluation report: “The self-evaluation also shows that decision-making processes are randomised and disparate. Initiatives comes from different actors and it not always clear through what administrative channels the initiatives should be processed, which in turn leads to confusion, unclear authority decisions and individual actions. In addition to this it is also unclear what administrative functions are or should be involved at what levels and the allocation of responsibilities between these. “

It is difficult to recommend an alternative structure for KTH, but after having read the self-evaluation report and after our interviews with key persons and groups it has become clear that a new structure that integrates academic and administrative aspects is needed, perhaps developed with help from outside (consultancy firm). The organizational structure should indicate clear ownership, responsibilities, mandate and budget.

Student recruitment

KTH is recommended

To review the structure and channels for student recruitment and to carry out a cost – benefit analysis of the channels /activities of the recruitment process

To set up a transparent action plan for all recruitment activities.

To revise to role of the schools in the recruitment process. Each school must formulate an international and recruitment strategy. The communication process between the central administration and the schools must improve.

To review the prioritised areas for recruitment and other international activities.

KTH invests a lot of resources in student recruitment. Several channels are used to inform and to recruit students. There are many persons and groups involved in these processes, but the responsibility between the groups is not always clear. The groups do not seem to have any clear mandate and it is also not clear who is member and who selects/appoints the members in each group. We have also got the impression that the schools seem to have abdicated from their responsibility in the recruitment process. The self-evaluation mentions 5 different groups for information sharing. The presentation ends with. “These groups are run through individual initiatives on a “need-to-know” basis often without involvement of the Heads of represented units and without any clear mission and mandate”. This is a conclusion that we agree with. The over-all impression is that there are many groups for sharing information but it has been difficult to see where the decisions are taken. One of our respondents expressed this: “It is hard to know who owns the question and who owns the budget.”

The cost for recruitment

It has been hard to find out from the self- evaluation the cost of the recruitment activities. At central level it seems to be about 10 FTE that are directly involved with the recruitment of international students. At School level are about 3, 5 FTE directly involved with recruitment. We are well aware of that these figures are a rough estimation and we would suggest a closer analysis of the staff resources that are used. There are for example no estimation of the costs for recruiting exchange students although at school level there are 3,6 FTE that work with international cooperation and about 17,4 FTE that with “administration of international students on campus”, which is not a recruitment activity. These figures refer to the persons that work directly with recruitment of international students, but there are more people involved sitting in different groups for sharing information.

The direct cost for student recruitment is also difficult to get a real grip on. According to the self-evaluation the direct costs is about 5,3 million SEK. Of that is 3,6 million SEK paid to a communication agency, which we find rather astonishing.

The result of the recruitment activities,(which is seen in Annex 1) is not so impressive when it comes to registered master students: 144 fee paying students and 418 students that are not liable to pay fees. The biggest part of international students is incoming exchange students with a total of 1058. It seems although that the costs to recruit exchange students are partly included in the general costs for recruitment. But much work is also carried out at school level.

From the figures given in the report it has not been possible to make a judgment whether this organization is cost effective or not. However we recommend that KTH carry out a closer analysis of the costs for student recruitment and benchmark with other similar institutions like Chalmers Institute of Technology and Karolinska Institutet. Also, we recommend to invest in a good CRM system to better follow up on the actions.

Action plan for recruitment activities

The self-evaluation describes several different activities for recruitment. The description is divided into the different target groups of students: master students, exchange students etc. It is sometimes difficult to follow the different activities and see how they correspond to each other. This may be a conclusion of the expert group but we also got the impression from the respondents that they had problems to get an overview of the recruitment activities. One respondent said that there were too many ad hoc decisions which made it difficult to plan the work

We recommend that KTH decide about an action plan for all recruitment activities and that this plan is communicated within the institution. The action plan should also contain a description of the different groups that are involved in the recruitment activities, their composition and mandate. It is also necessary that the schools are involved in this work from the beginning.

The role of the schools in the recruitment process

Are international students recruited to KTH or to one of its schools? The answer to this question differs depending on whom is answering. It is evident that the schools seem to take responsibility when it comes to recruit exchange students and to increase the number of outgoing students from the school. But when it comes to recruitment of international fee-paying students is our impression that the schools do not take the same role or responsibility. The recruitment of international fee-paying students is more centralized and the schools have in one or another way abdicated from involvement in the process. When it comes to participation in fairs the invitation arrives late to the school level and sometimes it can be difficult to take part in these activities.

The self-evaluation report concludes: "There are very different levels of involvement at Schools in international activities. (...)Also the communication between the central administration and different schools differs a lot in terms of efficiency and in the nature of entry point."

The schools must take more part in all recruitment activities, including involving alumni, at an early stage. Each school must be given the task to formulate a strategy for its own internationalization and recruitment.

We have noted that in the contract with the schools for the next year a target for international students will be set up and this is a step in the right direction, although it was not yet clear what the consequences would be if the schools would not meet the set targets.

Prioritised areas

KTH has decided prioritized areas for recruitment. These areas seem to be well communicated within the institution and the activities seem to very structured (yearly action plan, PDCA cycle). However many of our respondents were not sure for the reason choosing just these areas and who has made the decision. They were also unsure if it is possible to have recruitment activities in other areas/countries. KTH homepage in English gives the impression that the university is more interested to recruit students from the “focus regions” than from other.

We think that it is a good strategy to have certain areas that most of the efforts for recruitment are concentrated to. But as the respondents we are not convinced why just these areas have been selected. They are quite “traditional” or “common” areas for recruitment activities of higher education institutions. We are also like our respondents not clear who has decided about these areas and for how long time just they have priority. From the available statistics it is difficult to see if this concentration on prioritised areas has resulted in more students form the areas.

We recommend that an evaluation of the activities in the prioritised areas is carried out in the near future. This conclusion is also supported from the representatives of the schools who did not feel that they have been involved in the priority discussion. They also mentioned other countries where recruitment activities could be successful. We got the impression that the schools are unsure if they can recruit students from other areas/countries than those that have priority and how this is done. KTH has as a research university of excellence contacts with institutions all over the world. We believe that this must be a foundation for future recruitment of students and given more space in the recruitment work.

Student support

KTH is recommended:

To formulate a strategy for scholarships and consider introducing partial scholarships.

To work with the integration of the international students in university life and in the student community.

To continue to work with the question of accommodation for international students.

Scholarships

As described in the self-evaluation KTH has different processes for allocation of scholarships: tuition fee waivers and Erasmus Mundus scholarships. The processes described are complicated and involves several levels in the Central Administration and at school level. “A common feature for the two processes is that they are characterized by a great deal of competence and knowledge but also vulnerability as both are highly dependent on individual members of administrative staff in the University Administration”. We have not been able to analyze the processes in detail, but they are obviously working. We have the impression that the processes can be more effective and transparent and KTH is recommended to investigate how this could be done.

We have also noted that there seems not to be a clearly formulated strategy for scholarships. The strategy should address questions such as: allocation of scholarships, evaluation of merits and a plan for increasing the number of scholarships. The strategy could also contain principles for partial scholarships. Such a strategy could be included in an over-all international strategy for the university.

Integration of international students in the bigger student community

An international university must be able to integrate its international students in university life and in the bigger student community. The self-evaluation report does address this problem and is aware of its importance.

We just met four international students and had a very interesting discussion with them. They may not be representative for all international students but their message was clear. Overall they were quite positive, but there is too much information is only given in Swedish both from the university and the student union. The students also witnessed that they felt that there was a difference between the "international community" and the "Swedish community" at KTH. Also one school pointed out that there was not any clear plan how to integrate the students in university life and in the student community.

A first step towards a better integration must be to provide the same information in Swedish and in English. The international students must be given the same opportunities at the university as their Swedish colleagues.

Accommodation

Accommodation for all students in big cities like Stockholm is a problematic area. But for international students is it more urgent. The International Student Office (ISO) is responsible for KTH Accommodation that gives support to international students. The students we talked with were not satisfied with the support. One of them expressed: "Accommodation Office is a chaos". We learnt from the international students that they pay more for the same room as the Swedish students do which is doubtful or even illegal.