EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN EARLY CAREER

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyses the transition from HE to work for Norwegians who have studied abroad, compared to Norwegians with corresponding degrees from Norwegian universities and colleges. We look at employability, skills mismatch, job search strategies and to what extent graduates obtain international jobs. The results show that study experience from abroad has both positive and negative effects on labour market outcomes. Transition from higher education to work is less smooth for those graduated abroad than for domestic graduates, and they more often experience unemployment and skills mismatch. On the other hand, those who have studied abroad receive higher wages and hold more international jobs than domestic graduates. The results are discussed within the framework of general theories on transition from labour market to work and rationales of internationalisation of higher education.
INTRODUCTION
Student exchange may be considered as the best-known and most traditional form of internationalisation of higher education (Van Damme, 2001). Increasing numbers of young people undertake HE abroad, according to OECD figures more than 2 million students were studying abroad in 2003 (OECD 2005). A core political rationale for promotion of student mobility rests on the assumption that the international learning and study experience that students studying abroad acquire corresponds to the needs of a modern labour market, i.e. the knowledge-based economy needs international competencies that foreign studies can provide. Research on student mobility, however, has rarely addressed job-matching and labour market outcomes of study abroad. In general, such research has focused on either challenges faced by students coming from third world countries to western countries or participants in exchange programmes (e.g. ERASMUS), rather than applicability of international skills in the labour market.

The research presented here takes on the latter investigation and tests the assumed relationship between international higher education competencies and the labour market needs of a globalised knowledge economy at the level of the individual graduate and his or her labour market career. We look at the transition from Higher Education (HE) to work for graduates who have studied abroad, compared to graduates with diplomas from domestic higher education institutions (HEIs). We investigate vertical career dimensions like employment, unemployment and wages, as well as horizontal career dimensions; more precisely to what extent mobile students have more international jobs than non-mobile students. The aim is to present an overview of the main results from a survey-based research project comparing transitions from HE to work of former mobile and non-mobile students. More elaborate results from this project can be found in other publications (Wiers-Jenssen 2006, 2005, 2003, Wiers-Jenssen and Try 2005, Wiers-Jenssen and Støren 2004).

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALES FOR STUDENT EXPORT
Various stakeholders in the field of Higher Education have different rationales for internationalisation, and the borders between different types of motivation are blurred. However, some major categories can be identified. A division between educational, cultural, economic and political rationales is often made (Knight and de Wit, 1995; Blumental et. al., 1996; van der Wende, 1997; Knight, 2004). Economic rationales have become more important during recent years and educational services are increasingly becoming a commodity in a global market. The driving forces and policy rationales for internationalisation of HE in general overlap the rationales for student export and student exchange. Students themselves, at least students from western countries, tend to underscore educational and cultural aspects as rationales for studying abroad. An important motivation for choosing studies is the expectation that an education from other countries can lead to employment abroad or an international career (Opper et al., 1990; CSN, 1995; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). Students emphasize the ‘added value’ of studying abroad and expect that extracurricular skills such as linguistic and cultural competence will be appreciated by employers (Wiers-Jenssen, 2003; Krzaklewska & Krupnik, 2006). However, there has been limited research on to what extent education from abroad actually lead to employment abroad or jobs with international works assignments.
Norwegian student export

Norway has long traditions for student export, and a higher ratio of students abroad than most OECD-countries (OECD, 2005; Kelo et. al 2006). In 2005 between 6.5 and 10 percent of the total student population studied abroad, depending on whether exchange students are included in the figures (Wiers-Jenssen, 2005). A high ratio of students abroad is an objective of Norwegian HE policy (White Paper No 19, 1996–97; White Paper No. 27, 2000–2001), and is encouraged by relatively favourable financial arrangements offered through the State Education Loan Fund (Lånekassen).

The most explicit rationales for this policy are educational and cultural, for example the necessity for a small nation to secure an «international outlook». Political rationales for internationalisation are also seen, i.e. in the high priority of participation in the ERASMUS programme (though Norway is not a member of the European Union). Economic rationales of securing educational diversity are also expressed (White Paper No 19, 1996–97). For a high cost country, there are also more subtle economic reasons for supporting student export. State expenditure on domestic HE is high, due to that most HEIs are public with no tuition fees. Providing students with grants and subsidised loans for studying abroad may in many cases be less expensive than adjusting domestic enrolment capacity to fluctuating demands.

FORMER RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Internationalisation and study abroad is encouraged by many stakeholders in HE, and studying abroad seems often to be considered as an advantage per se. Outcomes of study abroad have been measured in terms of self-assessed language improvement (Maiworm & Teichler, 2002) and development of extracurricular skills like intercultural communication skills (Williams 2005) and international understanding (Carlson et al., 1990). Though a sojourn abroad may be rewarding from a personal perspective, and that cultural contact is valuable for individuals as well as society, this does not necessarily imply that individual career opportunities are improved or that extracurricular skills gained abroad are required in the jobs the graduates obtain. Hence, there is a need for investigating labour market effects of education from abroad. Research that has been done on labour market outcomes of mobile students rarely include control groups of students educated in the home country (see e.g. Opper et al.1990, Zadeh 1999, Lianos et al., 2004). This research tells us that mobile students hold international jobs, but without corresponding information on non-mobile students, we do not know whether mobile students are more likely to hold international jobs than non-mobile students.

One of the few studies that compares labour market outcomes of mobile and non-mobile students made by Jahr and Teichler (2000). Results show that mobile students more often than non-mobile students gather working experience abroad, and that mobile students have more international work assignments. The authors conclude that study abroad is a step towards a horizontal differentiation of job roles as far as the international dimension is concerned, but the fundament for drawing such a general conclusion seems somewhat weak, as this study does not control for subject field.

Labour market outcomes of education from abroad are addressed in a number of studies on immigrants on the labour market. A main result from such studies is that education from abroad gives a poorer outcome than education from the host country. This has been shown for the USA (Borjas 1995, Funkhouser and Trejo 1995, Bratsberg and Ragan 1998, Zeng
and Xie 2004), for Canada (Krahn et al. 2000) and for Israel (Friedberg 2000). These studies indicate an imperfect portability of skills across borders. We hypothesize may also affect non-immigrants with HE from abroad, due to some common challenges; professional networks are likely to be weaker, employers may not posit sufficient knowledge of education from foreign HEIs and country-specific human capital from abroad may not be in demand.

Theoretical contributions to the understanding of transition from HE to work for groups educated abroad are scarce, hence more general theories linking education to work are applied. Economic theories of human capital and signalling as well as sociological theory of networks contribute to explain why education may be imperfectly portable across countries.

**Human capital and signalling theories**

Human capital theory regards educational choice as investment decisions where schooling enhances productivity (Mincer, 1958; Becker, 1964). According to this theory, a positive relationship between education and the degree of labour market success is expected. The standard version of the theory does not distinguish between foreign and domestic education, but in research on immigrants in the labour market a division between country-specific and general human capital is often made (Friedberg, 2000; Duvander, 2001; Chiswick & Miller, 2003). Examples of country-specific human capital are language skills, cultural skills and professional skills adapted to national requirements. It is assumed that foreign and domestic educations are not equivalents, as parts of the education are related to country-specific human capital. In general, the latter human capital component may be more applicable in the country where the education is undertaken than elsewhere, although country-specific human capital from abroad will certainly be in demand in certain segments of the labour market. We find the concept of country-specific human capital applicable for mobile students. Parts of what is often labelled as the ‘added value’ of studying abroad can be considered as country-specific human capital. Also, a lower level of human capital specific to the home country is attached to education acquired abroad, which may be a disadvantage in certain jobs.

Signalling theories focus on the sorting and signalling effects of education (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1973). Education from abroad may signal extracurricular skills and certain personal proprieties, like independence, initiative, open-mindedness and social and symbolic capital. HE from abroad may have an important symbolic value, maybe even more so if it is from the “right” institutions, with access to the “right” networks. In an era of massification of HE, it has been claimed that the value of education is decreasing, and having the “right” credentials is of increasing importance (Dore 1976, Collins 1979, Bourdieu and Boltanski 1975, Goldthorpe 1996). However, HE from abroad may also have weak or negative signalling effects, for example if it is less known or acknowledged by domestic employers. This is likely to affect vertical career opportunities like job probability, but may also influence horizontal careers if former mobile students are offered poor opportunities to apply their international skills.

**Networks and social capital**

Network theories explain how information about vacant positions becomes available and trusted through personal and institutional relationships (Granovetter 1985, 1995; Rosenbaum et al. 1990). Relatives, friends, previous colleagues and employers may be important sources to information about jobs, and according to Granovetter, “weak ties” rather than the closest relationships are of particular importance in job matching. Resources situated in social networks may also be labelled as social capital (Bourdieu 1985; Coleman 1990).
Knowing the “right people” is relevant also in meritocratic societies. Due to the sojourn abroad, mobile students may have less institutional and social relations in their home country than non-mobile students, and this may turn out to be an obstacle to job-search if they return home after graduation. We assume that graduates from domestic HEIs may have achieved access to professional networks through their contacts within HE (lecturers, tutors, supervisors), or in contact with the labour market through work placement or jobs held in combination with study courses.

**TOPICS: ASPECTS OF VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL CAREER DIMENSIONS**

The main question is whether graduates who have studied abroad have other career outcomes than graduates with diplomas from domestic HEIs. The following dimensions are investigated:

- Employment and unemployment
- Skills mismatch
- Job search
- Wages
- Postgraduate working experience abroad
- Use of foreign language skills in current employment
- International dimension of work tasks

The first four topics are related to vertical career dimensions, while the three last ones are related to horizontal career dimensions.

**DATA & METHODS**

Data are drawn from the NIFU Graduate Survey 2002. This survey comprises college and university graduates from foreign and Norwegian and institutions within most of the higher degree studies and selected lower degree studies. The sample is stratified and graduates from HE institutions abroad are over-represented. The analysis includes 914 respondents who graduated abroad and 1386 who graduated in Norway. Of the latter, 286 had taken parts of their education abroad, while the remaining 1100 were had undertaken their entire education domestically. All students in this sample are Norwegians. The NIFU graduate survey 2002 also contains information about immigrant groups, and analyses of these are analysed in other publications (Støren, 2005).

All variables are based on self-reported data from the questionnaire, including retrospective information for the period three-and-a-half to five years following graduation. In the tables showing mean distributions, the data are weighted according to the stratifying sampling procedure in order to correct for the over- and under-representation in the sample. In the regressions analyses referred, no weights are used because all the stratifying variables are used as control variables.

The overall response rate is 56%, with a significantly higher response among domestic graduates (61%) than among those graduating abroad (47%). One reason for the higher drop-out among the latter group could be inaccuracy in the data register defining this part of

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1 Higher level studies are defined as those requiring more than 4 years of HE in Norway. The major higher level studies not included in the survey are Law, Teaching/Pedagogy and degrees related to primary industries. Lower degree studies included in the survey are Business administration, Nursing and Physiotherapy.
the sample, causing some people to have been included in the gross sample without being in the actual target group for the survey.²

Our point of departure was to treat origin of education bivariately according to origin of diploma (abroad graduates vs. domestic graduates). Assuming that origin of diplomas is crucial when entering the labour market we have grouped together all who have graduated abroad. However, mobility experience is a complex phenomenon, and many graduates have studied abroad as well as in Norway. About 50 percent of those graduated abroad, has also undertaken HE in Norway. Among domestic graduates, 17 per cent have had also studied abroad (most of them for a year or less). In some analyses, the latter graduates are treated as a separate group, particularly when investigating horizontal career dimensions. Thereby three groups are compared:

- Mobile students, graduated abroad = abroad graduates
- Mobile students graduated domestically, but who have undertaken parts of HE abroad
- Non-mobile students = home graduates without sojourn abroad

For simplicity, the groups are labelled mobile/non-mobile students, even though they are technically former students.

VERTICAL CAREER DIMENSIONS

Employment and unemployment

3.5-5 years after graduation (at the time of the survey), the employment rate among mobile as well as non-mobile students is high; 92 percent among mobile students graduated abroad, 94 percent among mobile students graduated domestically and 96 per cent among non-mobile students. Though the variations in employment rates are moderate, the difference between those graduated abroad and those graduated domestically are statistically significant. The probability of being employed is also investigated in regression models, and the results showed that those who are graduated abroad had a lower probability of being employed also after controlling for other variables (Wiers-Jenssen and Try 2003).

Employment rates vary by subject field, but the pattern is similar for those graduated abroad and domestically. Graduates in humanities and social sciences have lower employment rates than other groups.

The proportion outside the work force is higher among mobile than mobile students (5 vs. 3 percent), and so are the unemployment rates. But differences between mobile and non-mobile students become more evident when looking at unemployment history. Figure 1 shows the ratio reporting unemployment at different stages of the career.³ Mobile students graduated abroad are significantly more likely to have faced unemployment than other groups at all stages. Unemployment rates vary by subject field; graduates in humanities are generally more exposed. Among graduates in business and administration and health care sciences, differences in unemployment rates are significantly higher among those graduated abroad (Wiers-Jenssen 2005; tab 5.4 and 5.5).

² Domestic graduates are drawn from the Education administrative register of Statistics Norway, while abroad graduates are drawn from the State Education Loan Fund data register. The latter register does not define completed and non-completed studies adequately; thus some students concluding their studies without graduating are included in the gross sample, but they are excluded from the data-set used in this paper.

³ Ratios for unemployment are calculated for all graduates, not just those who are a part of the work force.
Multivariate regression analyses investigating the likelihood of having experienced unemployment at some stage after graduation, confirms that those who are graduated abroad are more likely to have faced unemployment, also after controlling for other variables (Wiers-Jenssen 2005: tab. 5.6). Among other variables showing significant effects in these analyses are high intake score and relevant working experience, both reducing the chances unemployment. The latter effect is statistically significant only for those graduated domestically, indicating that formation of professional networks while studying is important, in line with network theories. Having studied at prestigious HEIs abroad and having graduated from HEIs in Nordic countries also reduces the likelihood of unemployment. Positive signalling effects may be an explanation to this. Having studied in prestigious institutions can be interpreted as an indicator of selectivity. Prestigious institutions are also more likely to be known to employers, and so is education from Nordic countries. Assuming that employers want to minimize risk, diplomas from well-known HEIs may be preferred to diplomas from HEIs and countries employers are less familiar with.

Job search strategies
Mobile students have searched for more jobs, and used more strategies for finding a job than non-mobile students, those graduated abroad in particular. Among those who have actively searched for jobs, the average number of applications sent before obtaining the first post-graduate employment is 12 applications among mobile students graduated abroad, 10 applications among mobile students graduated domestically and 6 applications among non-mobile students.

The strategies applied for obtaining jobs, and the strategies actually leading to a job match are also somewhat different. Domestic graduates make more use of their professional network, while abroad graduates make use of their personal and family network. This could be due to several reasons. Abroad graduates may have less extensive professional networks domestically, due to their sojourn abroad. Their use of family connections may be caused by necessity; those facing difficulties in finding a job may become more creative in using their networks. Another possible explanation could be that mobile students have access to more relevant personal networks. A higher percentage of them have parents with higher education, and family connections and other acquaintances may constitute a social capital that improves graduates’ job-opportunities.
Skills-mismatch
To what extent does graduates experience that their degree is relevant in present employment? Relevance is a complex concept and may be seen as a rather subjective measure. We have used a question often applied in labour market research that looks at the relevance of the level of education demanded for doing the work tasks in present employment. Two in three graduates recon that their work tasks require education at the same level as they possess. Among the remaining third, those graduated abroad more often than those graduated domestically state that their work tasks requires a lower level of education (Wiers-Jenssen 2005; tab 5.8).

Over-education is another concept that can be defined in many ways. We use a wide definition of over-qualification, that also includes jobs that require HE, but at a lower lever than the degree the graduate possess⁴. Applying this definition, the ratio of over-educated is 20 among mobile students graduated abroad, 17 among mobile students domestically and 15 among non-mobile students. As with several other indicators of labour market outcome, over-education varies more by subject field than by whether the education is undertaken abroad or not. Regression analyses show that graduates in humanities have a significantly higher probability of over-education than the reference group (natural sciences), while the probability is lower for graduates within all kinds of health (care) sciences (Wiers-Jenssen & Try 2003). These analyses confirm that abroad graduates have a higher probability of over-education than home graduates even after controlling for other basic independent variables.

Wages
Wage is an indicator of economic returns from education, and telling about the attractiveness of graduates in the labour market. Comparing the wages of abroad graduates and domestic graduates, we find that abroad graduates’ earn 15% more than domestic graduates. Figure 2 shows the gross monthly income in November 2002 for graduates employed in Norway. We see that wages vary substantially by subject field

Figure 2 Gross ordinary monthly income (overtime not included) November 2002 for graduates employed in Norway. NOK.

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⁴ The classic definition of over-education is narrower, and does not include jobs requiring higher education.
Graduates in business and administration, technology and science and in health care sciences, higher level, have the highest average wages, independent of whether they are graduated abroad or domestically\(^5\). This pattern persists also in linear regression analyses of wages (Wiers-Jenssen and Try 2003, Wiers-Jenssen 2005). When we control for many variables the wage premium of abroad graduates are drastically reduced. However, the regression analyses confirm that abroad graduates have a small wage premium, also when controlled for other variables.

**HORIZONTAL CAREER DIMENSIONS**

Research on students' motives for studying abroad, shows that a central motivation for choosing to study abroad is the anticipation that an education from other countries can lead to employment abroad or an international career (Opper et al., 1990; CSN, 1995; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). Seen from a macro perspective, the extent to which mobile students hold international jobs can be seen as a success indicator of certain aspects of aspects of cultural and educational, but also economic rationales for student exchange.

**Working experience abroad**

Mobile students report far more interest in working abroad than non-mobile students. The difference between mobile and non-mobile students becomes more striking when it comes to actively pursuing ambitions about gaining working experience abroad. Significantly more mobile than non-mobile students have searched for and obtained employment abroad, mobile students graduated abroad in particular (fig. 3). At the time of the survey one out of five mobile students graduated abroad is working abroad, while less than one in fifty domestic graduates is doing the same.

**Figure 3 Percentage of graduates who have searched for and obtained employment abroad.**

Pursuing a career abroad may be influenced by many different factors. Logistic regression analyses were conducted, investigating the probability of working abroad among those who were employed at the time of the data collection. The analyses confirmed that mobile students graduated abroad are more likely to work abroad than mobile students graduated domestically and non-mobile students. Other positive predictors were previous experience.

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\(^5\) It may seem surprising that medical doctors are not higher, but this is explained by that overtime is not included in the figures, and that it is still early in the doctors' career.
with living abroad and high intake score (Wiers-Jenssen 2006). The latter finding indicates that the best graduates are more likely to succeed in a competitive market abroad. Those who had studied in Nordic countries were more likely to work abroad than others. Geographic, linguistic and cultural proximity may lower the thresholds for working in these countries. Subject field did not show significant effects, except that those who have studied medicine were less likely to work abroad. Among mobile students, graduates who were married or cohabitant, were more likely to work abroad, while women with children were less likely to work abroad.

**International jobs among domestically employed**

Working abroad is one way of pursuing a career where skills gained abroad can be applied. Having a job domestically containing work tasks with an international dimension is another way of making use of international skills, and that is what we will look at in this section. Figure 4 shows that significantly more mobile than non-mobile graduates work in international firms and Norwegian firms with branch offices abroad, and that the proportion working in international firms is highest among abroad graduates. We also see that mobile graduates are more inclined to go on business trips abroad.

**Figure 4. Percentage of graduates working in international firms and making business trips abroad.**

Mobile graduates report more frequent use of foreign languages for different work tasks than domestic graduates (Fig 5). In this case differences between mobile graduates with diploma from foreign HEIs vs. domestic HEIs are small. Additional analyses shows that those who have studied in English-speaking countries apply language skills more frequently than others (Wiers-Jenssen 2006).

**Figure 5. Use of foreign languages for different work tasks. Mean score, 1(rarely or never)– 4(almost daily)**
As for subject field, graduates with a higher degree in natural science and technology, and in business and administration, are the groups reporting the most frequent use of languages. At the other end of the scale we find those who have a lower degree in health care sciences (nursing and physiotherapy).

What is an international job? This can be defined in many ways. We have constructed an index based on whether the graduates work in an international firm, extent of business travel abroad and to what extent the graduates apply (foreign) language skills in their current job,\(^6\) (see Wiers-Jenssen 2006 for details). The score goes from 0-6, the higher the score, the more international the job. In figure 6 we see that mobile students’ score on this index is higher than non-mobile students’ and that mean scores vary substantially by subject field\(^7\).

Figure 6. International job index, mean scores.

Regression analyses were conducted to investigate whether differences between mobile and non-mobile students and graduates from different subject fields persists when controlled for other variables. The results showed that this is the case (Wiers-Jenssen 2006). The pattern between different subject fields was not significantly altered in the regression analyses. These analyses also showed that the most recently graduated students have jobs with less international aspects. This indicates that it may take some time to find a job match where international skills can be applied. However, the country/region in which HE is undertaken did not have any significant effect on the probability of holding an international job in these models.

**SUM UP & CONCLUSION**

Education from abroad has both positive and negative effects on outcomes in the labour market. Table 1 gives a rough sum up of the effects of HE, compared to an all-domestic education. (The plus signs indicates “more” or “higher”, and are not necessarily positive effects.)

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\(^6\) For application of language, we have added all items in Figure 3, and divided the scores into four categories, each comprising approximately 25% of the sample.

\(^7\) Mean scores for mobile students graduated abroad and mobile students graduated domestically were fairly similar, hence the two categories are grouped together.
Table 1. Effects of studying abroad on vertical and horizontal career dimensions.

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<th>Mobile, graduated abroad</th>
<th>Mobile, graduated domestically</th>
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<td><strong>Vertical career dimensions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment rate</td>
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<td>Experienced unemployment after graduation</td>
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<td>Job search</td>
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<td>Skills mismatch (over-education)</td>
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<td>Wage</td>
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<td><strong>Horizontal career dimensions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment abroad 3.5-5 years after graduation</td>
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<td>International job</td>
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Abroad graduates have a lower job-probability and a higher risk of unemployment and over-education than domestic graduates, though the quantitative differences may be interpreted as modest. Those graduated abroad put more effort into job search, and it seems like admission to relevant jobs is somewhat constrained. Lack of relevant professional network is likely to explain parts of this, though employer scepticism or absence of relevant country-specific human capital can not be excluded. However, the finding that economic returns are higher among abroad graduates indicates that possible negative signalling effects or scepticism among employers dissolve after the graduate gets hired. The fact that mobile students graduated abroad have a wage premium, suggests that employers consider them as productive employees.

Mobile students have more international jobs than non-mobile students. They acquire working experience abroad to a significantly higher degree than non-mobile students. However, 4 in 5 work in Norway 3.5 – 5 years after graduation. This shows that “brain drain” can not be considered a serious problem. Mobile students who have returned to Norway hold more international jobs; e.g. working in international firms, doing business travel abroad and applying foreign languages for different work-related purposes, compared to non-mobile student.

To what extent graduates have international jobs, vary by type of education, and to some extent in which country the educations is undertaken. It seems likely that students in different subject fields may have different expectations to the outcomes of studying abroad. We may also assume that the government has different expectations to different groups. By choosing to study abroad groups like doctors and nurses obtain the education and jobs that they want, and supply the Norwegian labour market with qualified professionals. Linguistic and cultural skills is a bonus, but of limited demand in their jobs. In other segments of the labour market, the linguistic and cultural outcomes are more applicable and extracurricular skills gives access to different types of jobs.

In general, we can say that education from abroad have stronger effects on horizontal than vertical career. This is particularly true for the mobile students graduated in Norway.
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