

Chapter 6. Internationalisation of the Colombian tertiary education system

This chapter documents the growing importance of internationalisation for governments and tertiary institutions around the world, and analyses the international dimension of tertiary education in Colombia.

The chapter closes with the review team's recommendations, including (i) introduction of a comprehensive approach to internationalisation in Colombia; (ii) including the international dimension of tertiary education in national policy discussions; (iii) encouraging institutions to introduce international elements into curricula; (iv) encouraging more students to acquire competency in a second language; and (v) efforts to increase levels of student and academic mobility, improve internationalisation information on SNIES and co-ordinate support for scholarship programmes for graduate studies abroad.

Introduction

In recent years, the internationalisation of higher education has grown in importance in policy making at both government and institutional level in many parts of the world, particularly in OECD countries. Even the concept of internationalisation itself has evolved into a more integral idea, which includes the adoption of an international dimension into the teaching, research and public functions of higher education institutions.

Colombia has not been exempt from this trend. Internationalisation was identified as a priority in the National Policy on Education 2011-14 (MEN, 2011), and is also included in the strategic plans of the majority of tertiary education institutions.

Nevertheless, important work remains to be done, since in too many cases internationalisation is limited to student mobility and the signing of international agreements by institutional leaders.

This chapter analyses the international dimension of tertiary education in Colombia and concludes with recommendations for consideration by government, educational agencies and institutions.

The growing importance and changing nature of internationalisation

For many years, internationalisation was seen as a marginal activity by the majority of tertiary education institutions, and was barely considered by national governments when establishing national educational or foreign trade policies.

However, as part of the increasingly globalised world, the international dimension of tertiary education has gained growing importance, and it has adopted varied and more sophisticated forms. These include the internationalisation of academic programmes offered by institutions, the creation of joint and dual academic programmes in conjunction with foreign institutions, the opening of branch campuses of institutions abroad, the international certification of skills and degrees, the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes by foreign agencies, the creation of language centres and the establishment of bilingual or trilingual graduation requirements in tertiary education institutions, the growing participation of researchers on international teams with peers from other countries, the acceptance of distance education-based courses offered by foreign providers as part of the regular curriculum of domestic students, the participation in international consortia, and the desire of institutions and governments to be part of world university rankings.

At the government level, many countries have included international higher education as a key component of their foreign trade policy, as well as part of their migratory policies aimed at attracting and retaining talent from abroad. In other countries, it is a core part of their foreign public policy diplomacy.

All of the above has stimulated higher education institutions to pay more attention to their international agenda. They have given this area a more central role in their overall strategies and established better support infrastructure. A good indicator of such growing importance at the institutional level is found at the 3rd Global Survey on Internationalization of Higher Education by the International Association of Universities (IAU) (Egron-Polak and Hudson, 2010), which surveyed 745 higher education institutions worldwide in 2009. Among other findings, the survey showed that:

- Eighty-seven percent of participating institutions have formally included internationalisation in their institutional mission statement.

- In 65% of participants institutional leadership assigns a high level of importance to internationalisation. The level of importance has significantly increased in recent years in the majority of institutions in comparison with previous surveys conducted in 2003 and 2005.

Latin America and, for that matter, Colombia, has not been immune to such trends. In addition to actions motivated by the establishment of regional integration agreements signed by governments, more higher education institutions see the need to strengthen their international work as a response to the impacts associated with globalisation (García Guadilla, 2010).

Nevertheless, the reasons behind the decision to give more importance to internationalisation vary from country to country and from institution to institution. According to the IAU Global Survey, the top five rationales for internationalisation of higher education identified by participating institutions are, in order of importance, the improvement of student preparedness, internationalisation of the curriculum, enhancement of the international profile of the institution, strengthening research and knowledge production, and increasing and diversifying the source of students (Egron-Polak and Hudson, 2010).

Interestingly the IAU Survey confirms that government policies at national, regional or local levels and demands from business and industry are by far the two most important external drivers for increased internationalisation of higher education institutions around the world. In Latin America, as indicated by Gacel-Ávila (2010), institutions generally attribute less importance to government policies than elsewhere, which is due to the lack of public policies in the region aimed at fostering internationalisation of higher education.

On a global basis, at the same time as institutions have been diversifying their international activities, the most traditional form of internationalisation – mobility of students – remains small in percentage terms compared to the overall student enrolment in higher education institutions, though it has been growing in volume in recent years and it is expected to continue growing in future years (Macready and Tucker, 2011; Bhandari and Belyavina, 2012).

Internationalisation of tertiary education in Colombia

Internationalisation at national level

In line with trends in other parts of the world and elsewhere in Latin America, universities in Colombia have embraced the concept of internationalisation. Its importance is gradually growing in the public

discourse of university leaders, as well as in government discussions of educational policy. Efforts in this direction have been supported by the Ministry of National Education through the Promotion of Internationalisation of Higher Education Project, and different agencies have established a variety of internationalisation activities. Key challenges remaining are: establishing and supporting bold policies, co-ordinating the efforts of different entities and, most importantly, implementing a coherent and comprehensive set of specific internationalisation programmes and activities.

In recent years important advances have been achieved in internationalisation matters. At institutional level, many institutions have established formal offices dedicated to international affairs and there is increased professionalisation of the individuals working in this area, as seen in the work done by the Colombian Network for the Internationalisation of Higher Education (RCI, *Red Colombiana para la Internacionalización de la Educación Superior*), established officially in 1998, which conducts periodic professional development conferences, among other activities. In addition, ICETEX runs a reciprocity programme, which supports foreign teachers, researchers and language assistants to come to Colombia and teach their respective native languages in a range of tertiary institutions.

There is a still small but growing presence of Colombian tertiary institutions and government agencies in international education conferences and fairs, and an active involvement of Colombian institutions and organisations in a variety of international networks and consortia, mostly in the Latin American and the Ibero-American context. In addition, Colombia intends to become a hub for internationalisation of higher education in Latin America through the creation of the Annual Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Conference (LACHEC), which is co-sponsored by the Colombian government.

At the policy level, one of the most significant recent achievements in this area is the increased recognition at the top level of government circles of the critical importance of internationalisation. It is encouraging to observe that internationalisation has been formally identified as one of the pillars for the future development of tertiary higher education in the country, which is expected to help drive an increase in Colombian competitiveness and international presence in the knowledge-based global economy. As expressed in the National Development Plan 2010-14, democratic prosperity in the country can only be achieved by fostering growth and competitiveness, in an environment characterised by peace and equality of opportunities for prosperity. All of the above require policies aimed at assuring good governance, innovation, environmental sustainability and, finally, international relevance (DNP, 2011). In other words, the current

government strategy provides a very strong basis for internationalisation to take a more central role. The National Policy on Education 2011-2014 (MEN, 2011) includes the promotion of internationalisation as one of 10 specific strategies to be implemented in the tertiary education sector, and recognises the need to align the tertiary education system with regional and international trends. In addition to the Ministry of National Education, other entities and organisations supporting internationalisation work include COLCIENCIAS, ICETEX, the National Accreditation Commission and the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Within the Ministry of National Education, a useful project has been implemented to promote the internationalisation of tertiary education by advising institutions on strengthening internationalisation strategies; promoting Colombian tertiary education abroad, especially at the regional level; and establishing international alliances to strengthen national policies. Colombia is working on promoting regional integration in Latin America and Caribbean, and facilitating collaboration between their universities and universities abroad. One of the main strategies to achieve this goal is to promote recognition agreements between Colombia and other countries in order to facilitate academic mobility within the region. These recognition agreements are based on quality assurance criteria. Also, the changes the government proposed to Law 30 in 2011 also mentioned the internationalisation agenda, though without going into detail.

The review team recommends, therefore, that in future, policy discussions and consideration of legal changes should include the international dimension of tertiary education when relevant, and that there should be specific programmes to implement policies in this area.

Internationalisation at institutional level

At the institutional level there are clear signs of the growing importance of internationalisation. Although involvement of specific institutions in international activities is nothing new in Colombia, not until the last decade was significant progress apparent, as can be seen from a survey conducted in 2002 by Jaramillo (2007).

A comprehensive survey conducted in 2006 by the Colombian Network for the Internationalisation of Higher Education (RCI) describes a stratified level of development by types of institutions. As expected, both public and private universities have the highest level of development and support infrastructure for internationalisation, while professional technical institutes and technological institutes have a much lower level of development. Also, there is the perception of important differences between urban institutions, especially the ones located in the major metropolitan areas, and institutions

in less developed regions and rural areas. For instance, although 43% of institutions participating in the survey indicated that they have a formal office dedicated to conducting international activities on campus, only 6% of professional technical institutes and technological institutes had such an office, while 29% of university institutions and 71% of universities have such support infrastructure (ASCUN, 2007).

Of course, having an office dedicated to attending to international affairs is not enough to internationalise an institution, especially when its purpose is unclear, when it is not properly staffed, and when it is not centrally connected to the overall mission and institutional priorities.

Towards comprehensive internationalisation of tertiary education in Colombia

As John Hudzik (Hudzik, 2011) said, “Comprehensive internationalisation is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units. It is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility. Comprehensive internationalisation not only impacts all of campus life but the institution’s external frames of reference, partnerships, and relations. The global reconfiguration of economies, systems of trade, research, and communication, and the impact of global forces on local life, dramatically expand the need for comprehensive internationalisation and the motivations and purposes driving it.”

It is clear that internationalisation has been adopted in the public discourse in higher education in Colombia, both at government and at institutional level, and that on both levels there is interest in and excitement about continuing improvement in this arena. There is evidence that some efforts are underway. However, in most cases actions are small, marginal and have a very limited impact. An overall comprehensive approach to internationalisation is still lacking, and needs to be introduced, bearing in mind that the approach adopted should contribute to the relevance of higher education, to the success of graduates of institutions, and, ultimately, to the incorporation of Colombian tertiary institutions into the global knowledge-based economy.

This does not mean establishing a completely new and separate internationalisation strategy for tertiary education, but, rather, incorporating internationalisation into the overall strategy for improvement of tertiary

education, both systemically and at the institutional level. Ultimately, internationalisation activity on campus is useful only if it contributes to the fulfilment of tertiary education's main purposes. What is the connection between graduates having a second language competence and their overall preparation for work? What is the contribution of hosting foreign scholars and students on campus to the international awareness of local students and academic staff? What is the benefit to domestic academic programmes of establishing dual degrees in connection with other foreign institutions? Those are some of the questions that must be addressed, both in government circles when establishing programmes aimed at stimulating internationalisation of higher education and in institutional decision-making processes.

By properly responding to these questions, both government and institutions may be in a better position to outline goals for internationalisation, specific strategies and concrete programmes to achieve the goals, and suitable metrics to evaluate performance.

The need to internationalise tertiary education in Colombia has been expressed by the same Colombian institutional leaders and practitioners on many different occasions (ASCUN, 2003; Rizo P. *et al.*, 2009). As expressed in the conclusions of the 2009 meeting of the Colombian Network for Internationalisation of Higher Education, “since Colombia is not in an advantageous position to compete with other countries in matters related to internationalisation of higher education strategies, the country cannot afford the luxury of internationalising just in order to fulfil a requirement. It should internationalise its higher education with pertinence and taking in consideration its strengths and needs.” (Rizo P. *et al.*, 2009)

Since 2009, this lack of vision at the national level has been changing. National government authorities and agencies have increasingly worked together to promote internationalisation and to provide the conditions in which Colombian higher education institutions can strengthen their own internationalisation strategies and processes. The government has established a National Programme for Advising Higher Education Institutions on Internationalisation, led by the Ministry of National Education in collaboration with a group of accredited universities. The overall goal of this programme is to create institutional internationalisation capacity and to promote the Colombian higher education system abroad. A major pillar of the strategy has been the active involvement of the 23 accredited universities in advising the less internationalised institutions through sharing knowledge and experience. According to information provided by the Ministry of National Education, between 2009 and 2011 this programme advised 69 tertiary institutions nationwide, resulting in the development of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy in each. The

programme also includes activities aimed at promoting the Colombian higher education system and its institutions abroad, through an aggressive advertising campaign and participation in leading international education fairs abroad. And it is intended to promote regional integration in Latin America and the Caribbean by fostering collaboration between Colombian higher education institutions and partners abroad.

Nevertheless, there is still scope for a more comprehensive approach, based on the positive outcomes and lessons learnt from current efforts and activities at the government and institutional levels. Table 6.1 summarises the different domains of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy for consideration in tertiary education in Colombia.

Table 6.1 Components of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy for Colombian tertiary education

Domain	Current status	Recommendations for change
Global dimension in curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only in international discipline-based programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include, where feasible, as integral part of curriculum of all academic programmes in all institutions. • Proper training/incentive to faculty members. • Linking internationalisation to the accreditation processes, as well as approval and review of academic programmes.
Second language competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some institutions have established a second language graduation requirement. In most cases, extra-curricular courses will be paid. • Overall, low competency level in second language relative to international standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating second language courses at higher education level with previous levels of education. • Properly staffing institutions with qualified teachers/technical support. • Mainstreaming second language programmes into the curriculum rather than making them a graduation requirement.
International student and faculty mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely low relative to international standards and trends. Within the system there are important asymmetries between types of institutions/regions. • Credit and degree recognition from abroad is subject to excessively bureaucratic procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes of national scope for international student mobility targeting undergraduate students. • Review of migratory regulations for exchange students, and of credit recognition from abroad, in order to expedite processes. • Greater support to student and faculty mobility in targeted areas, which will contribute to institutional strengthening.

Domain	Current status	Recommendations for change
International partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A growing trend mostly responding to institutional inertia with limited vision of national/regional priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives to institutions developing national / international/cross-sector partnerships for teaching, research and public services. • Reviewing and addressing potential implications in terms of regulations.
Linkage of international human development policies and programmes with institutional capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available funding streams for graduate full-degree seeking abroad, mostly based on individual requests and preferences, with limited input from potential beneficiary institutions, and limited connection to institutional plans for advanced graduate and research infrastructure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more co-ordinated approach between COLCIENCIAS and higher education and research institutions regarding the scholarship programmes for graduate studies abroad. • More collaboration between COLCIENCIAS and COLFUTURO in the decision-making process for scholarships awarded with government funds. • Launching of institution-based development strategies for graduate and research programmes in areas of strategic national interest, for which preparation of faculty abroad is considered, and for which funding agencies can provide scholarships.
Presence of Colombia in relevant international fora and organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing but still marginal presence in key international fora and fairs. A new national initiative called Colombia Challenge Your Knowledge has been established to promote Colombia as a destination for academic and scientific collaboration in key relevant international fora. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more co-ordinated effort aimed at more visible participation of Colombian higher education in relevant international fora, organisations and international education fairs. The Colombia Challenge Your Knowledge Campaign could be institutionalised as a basis for this. • A more aggressive promotional campaign to targeted international audiences, disseminating information on Colombian higher education institutions. • Establishment of incentive programmes aimed at attracting more international students and scholars to Colombia.
Co-ordination and communication between offices of international education in order to share practices and co-ordinate international presence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic level of co-ordination and common professional development through RCI. • Limited trust between accredited and non-accredited institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further evolution of RCI (into a network of individuals devoted to internationalisation of higher education, rather than an appendix of ASCUN (Association of Colombian Universities, <i>Asociación de Universidades Colombianas</i>).

Source: Elaborated by the review team.

Internationalisation of the curriculum

Internationalisation efforts aimed solely at international student mobility will in the end benefit only a very small fraction of the overall student population. In fact, the most effective way to internationalise the academic offerings of tertiary education institutions is by adding a relevant international dimension to the curriculum of all programmes. Only by adding such a dimension to the regular curriculum can a majority of students benefit. This does not automatically mean that all academic offerings at an institution should become *de facto* international, but adding global dimensions into the curriculum where relevant enables students to acquire very important additional skills and a comparative perspective.

Institutions have gained some expertise in such matters where they have developed complete academic programmes in which there is a natural international dimension (such as undergraduate degrees in international relations or in international business). For instance, according to a survey conducted by RCI-ASCUN, in 2006 there were a total of 144 academic programmes in Colombia with an international focus, offered at 39% of the institutions participating in the study (ASCUN, 2007).

At the same time, some institutions in Colombia have offered dual and joint academic programmes in conjunction with universities abroad, mostly from Spain, the United States, China, Brazil and Mexico. According to the RCI Survey in 2006, there were also 31 Colombian higher education institutions offering academic programmes abroad, either through regular courses or through distance learning (ASCUN, 2007).

However, all institutions can consider the addition of an international dimension to regular academic programmes when they conduct their periodic reviews and update their academic offerings. Academic staff must be properly trained both in pedagogy and subject content to make such curriculum modification effective. The Ministry of National Education can, for its part, establish mechanisms to foster the addition of the international dimension as part of the regular procedures for admitting academic programmes to the Register of Qualified Programmes, or considering programmes for high quality accreditation. The high quality accreditation procedures and guidelines should be modified to encourage institutions to consider and incorporate an international dimension wherever this would improve graduates' job chances.

The Ministry of National Education is recommended to develop the quality assurance system so as to encourage tertiary institutions to consider introducing international elements into the curricula of all academic programmes, and other programmes where relevant.

Second language competency

A variety of programmes aimed at fostering competency in a second language have been established in Colombia in recent years, although their effectiveness remains unproven. The most recent effort has been the National Programme for Bilingualism 2004-2019, which established new standards for communicative competency in English as a foreign language. The programme was initiated by the previous national government, with an assessment of the competencies of elementary and secondary teachers and a follow-up strategy aimed at providing significant training in order to enhance their level of English and their pedagogical skills at least to a B2 level. In addition, in 2006 the Colombian government developed and established the basic standards for English as a Foreign Language. The Colombian government has been on the right track in identifying the second language proficiency policy as applicable to the entire educational system with emphasis on the elementary and secondary education levels. As has been demonstrated in other countries, it is unfeasible to have higher education institutions bear all of the responsibility for second language competency. Having a high quality and articulated second language curriculum from elementary to tertiary level is necessary to achieve widespread competency in a second language.

However, no evidence was shown to the members of the review team of the effectiveness of the Colombian bilingual initiative, seven years after its launch. Though it should be recognised that the impact of such a measure can only be evaluated over a long period of time, the preliminary results of the most recent SABER 11 tests are unimpressive. In private – mostly bilingual – schools, only 23.5% of test takers achieved a B1 competency level or higher, while in public schools only an insignificant 2.2% had a B1 level or higher (Fernández, 2011).

Bearing in mind that tertiary education institutions are receiving students with limited English proficiency, they have made significant efforts to address the problem of foreign language competencies. In 2006, more than half of tertiary institutions in Colombia – mostly the private ones – had established as a prerequisite for graduation at the undergraduate level presentation of a certificate of English competency. Also, more than two thirds of the universities participating in the ASCUN-RCI Survey (72%) offered their students the possibility of studying languages other than English, including French (30%), German (17%), Italian (14%) and Mandarin (7%) among others (ASCUN, 2007).

Nevertheless, the results of the ECAES/SABER PRO test may indicate that the effectiveness of the aforementioned efforts has been rather limited. During the period 2007-2010, the great majority of the test takers soon to be graduating from selected academic programmes in tertiary institutions lacked English competency. While in 2007, 73% of test takers were in levels A1 to A2 (and only 27% scored B1 and higher level), in 2010 77% of test takers had levels A1 to A2 and only 22% had B1 and higher levels (Fernández, 2011). Average proficiency in English needed to rise, but was actually falling. The fact that enrolment had been rising since 2002, bringing students with a wider range of prior academic preparation into the tertiary system, may have been a contributory factor but should not be regarded as an excuse.

A third proxy for foreign language competency level – specifically English – can be seen in Table 6.2, showing results from the 2011 EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) in which Colombia was ranked as number 41 out of 47 countries surveyed worldwide with a score of 42.77, which means “Very Low Proficiency”. Norway, ranked first, has an EPI score of 69.09 (EF, 2011).

To sum up, Colombia continues to be a country with a very low English competency by international standards, and the efforts made by the government and institutions to boost competency dramatically in students have shown no signs, as yet, of bearing fruit.

The review team considers that Colombians must recognise the issue of second language competency of tertiary graduates as a top priority, if the country seriously aspires to become a knowledge-based economy. Concerted action is needed at all levels of the educational system to achieve this, including but not confined to more effective preparation of teachers, incentive programmes for students and more resources for language centres. However, the country’s policy towards bilingual education ought to take account of the varying degrees to which English or another foreign language confers benefits on future graduates. While in the ideal world all students would gain second-language proficiency by the end of tertiary education, this proficiency is more important to some career paths and degree programmes than others. Likewise, some students can include second language studies in their programmes with fewer trade-offs against learning goals in their discipline than others. National policy development and implementation should incorporate these considerations, while maintaining the overall goal of second-language proficiency.

Table 6.2 English proficiency level in selected countries, 2011

Rank	Country	EF-EPI Score	Level
1	Norway	69.09	Very high proficiency
2	Netherlands	67.93	Very high proficiency
3	Denmark	66.58	Very high proficiency
4	Sweden	66.26	Very high proficiency
5	Finland	61.25	Very high proficiency
9	Malaysia	55.54	High proficiency
15	Portugal	53.62	Moderate proficiency
16	Argentina	53.49	Moderate proficiency
17	France	53.16	Moderate proficiency
18	Mexico	51.48	Moderate proficiency
22	Costa Rica	49.15	Low proficiency
24	Spain	49.01	Low proficiency
27	Guatemala	47.80	Low proficiency
28	El Salvador	47.65	Low proficiency
29	China	47.62	Low proficiency
30	India	47.35	Low proficiency
31	Brazil	47.27	Low proficiency
33	Dominican Republic	44.91	Very low proficiency
35	Peru	44.71	Very low proficiency
36	Chile	44.63	Very low proficiency
37	Ecuador	44.54	Very low proficiency
39	Venezuela	44.43	Very low proficiency
40	Panama	43.62	Very low proficiency
41	Colombia	42.77	Very low proficiency
42	Thailand	39.41	Very low proficiency
43	Turkey	37.66	Very low proficiency
44	Kazakhstan	31.74	Very low proficiency

Source: EF (2011).

It is recommended that the Ministry of National Education commission a specific external evaluation of its National Bilingual Programme in order to establish its effectiveness and define a course of action with concrete achievable goals in terms of proper second language competency for all graduates of tertiary education institutions.

It is also recommended that tertiary institutions work more effectively with previous levels of education and on the organisation of their own programmes, to boost the chances of all graduates concluding their undergraduate studies with functional competency in a second language. Second language competency should be embedded as an integral part of the regular curriculum in all academic programmes and, where relevant, other programmes, rather than just being a requirement for graduation.

Student and faculty mobility

An important component of the internationalisation of tertiary education is related to the international mobility of both students and academic staff, especially when the acquired experience abroad benefits not only the mobile individual but also student and faculty peers.

On a global basis, international student and faculty mobility has grown in recent years and is expected to continue to grow. In the case of students, OECD (2011) reports that:

- Over the past three decades, the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to 3.7 million in 2009, a more than fourfold increase.
- In descending order, Australia (21.5%), the United Kingdom (15.3%), Austria (15.1%), Switzerland (14.9%) and New Zealand (14.6%) have the highest percentages of international students among their tertiary enrolments. The average in OECD countries is 6.4%.
- In absolute terms, the largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea. Asian students represent 52% of foreign students enrolled worldwide.
- Some 83% of all foreign students are enrolled in G20 countries, while 77% of all foreign students are enrolled in OECD countries. These proportions have remained stable during the past decade.
- The dominance (in absolute numbers) of English-speaking destinations (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States) reflects the progressive adoption of English as a global language. It may also be because students intending to study abroad are likely to have learned English in their home country and/or wish to improve their English language skills through immersion in a native English-speaking context. Given this pattern, an increasing number of institutions in non-English-

speaking countries now offer courses in English to overcome their linguistic disadvantage in attracting foreign students. This trend is especially noticeable in countries in which the use of English is widespread, such as the Nordic countries.

It has been argued in many studies that the number of international students will probably continue to grow, considering among other factors that: expected demographic growth is largely concentrated in developing countries with rising birth rates and increasing demand for education; the emergence of some countries as major economic powers reinforces demand for higher education; high importance continues to be placed on foreign language competencies; and non-tertiary educational mobility has continuing growth potential. At the same time, factors limiting the potential growth in international mobility include the perceived risk of brain drain in sending countries; the growth of transnational education which makes some types of international education available to students without the need for them to go abroad; and the potential impact of the financial crisis (Macready and Tucker, 2011). The review team's ability to analyse international student and faculty mobility trends in Colombia was limited by the fact that, currently, no consistent information on the subject is being produced and disseminated by the Ministry of National Education. Apparently this issue will be addressed in a future version of the data collection process conducted annually among tertiary education institutions. However, the following information is available from the Survey conducted by RCI in 2006.

- Sixty-four percent of participating institutions reported having sent students abroad in the last five years, and 53% reported receiving foreign students.
- A total of 3 349 students enrolled in Colombian higher education institutions were studying abroad in 2006. That same year, Colombian institutions enrolled 1 424 foreign students (ASCUN, 2007).

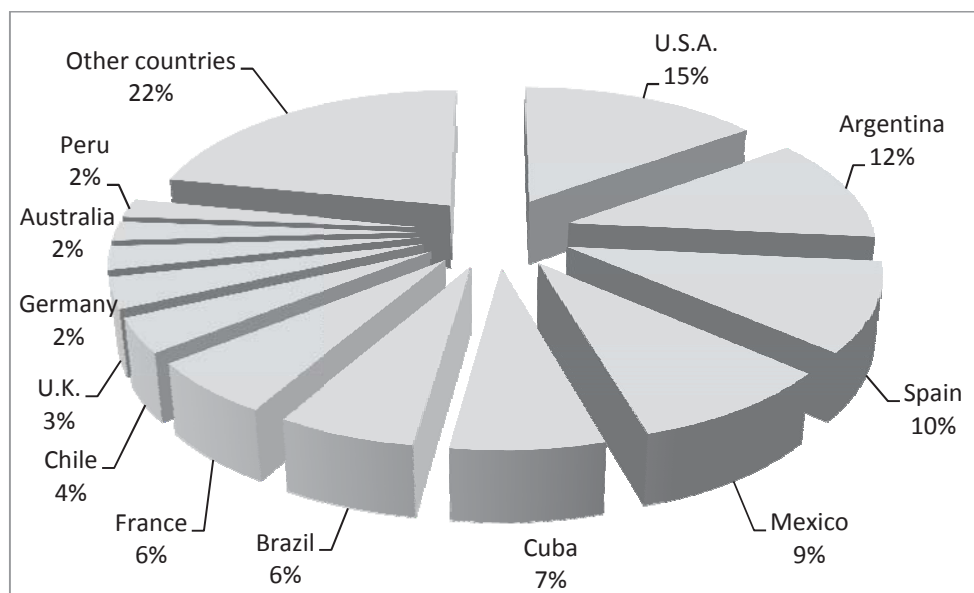
A review of data for 2011 entered by Colombian tertiary education institutions in SNIES is consistent with the overall numbers reported by RCI-ASCUN in 2006. According to SNIES, in 2011 there were 4 801 Colombian tertiary students abroad, mostly in the United States, Argentina, Spain, Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, France, Chile, England, Germany, Australia, and Peru (see Figure 6.1).¹ Forty three per cent of Colombian students abroad were spending a semester at another institution as part of academic exchange schemes, 32.9% were on an internship or practical training, 17.5% were on short term courses and 6% participated in a medical rotation abroad (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Distribution of Colombian higher education students studying abroad per country and type of mobility, 2011

Country	Type of student mobility				Total	%
	Short course	Internship or practice	Medical rotation	Academic semesters exchange		
United States	177	303	73	164	717	14.9
Argentina	99	178	30	251	558	11.6
Spain	15	80	101	277	473	9.9
Mexico	206	98	11	124	439	9.1
Cuba	28	289	1	4	322	6.7

Source: Calculations by the authors based on SNIES data.

Figure 6.1 Distribution of Colombian higher education students studying abroad, 2011



Source: Calculations by the authors based on SNIES data.

Considering that there are 1.6 million students enrolled in the Colombian tertiary education system, this means that a very low 0.19% of them were studying abroad in 2010. These data are not comparable with those reported in receiving countries, but such analysis gives some

indication of trends for Colombian higher education. For instance, in 2008 there were 23 306 Colombian students² enrolled in tertiary education institutions in OECD countries, either as full-degree seeking or as participants in temporary mobility programmes (see Table 6.3). Mexico and Brazil send more students abroad than Colombia, but Colombia's number is quite high bearing in mind that Mexico and Brazil both have much larger populations and enrolments in tertiary education. Nevertheless, Colombian students represented only 10% of the 228 835 international students from South America (the Colombian population makes up about 12% of the total South American population).

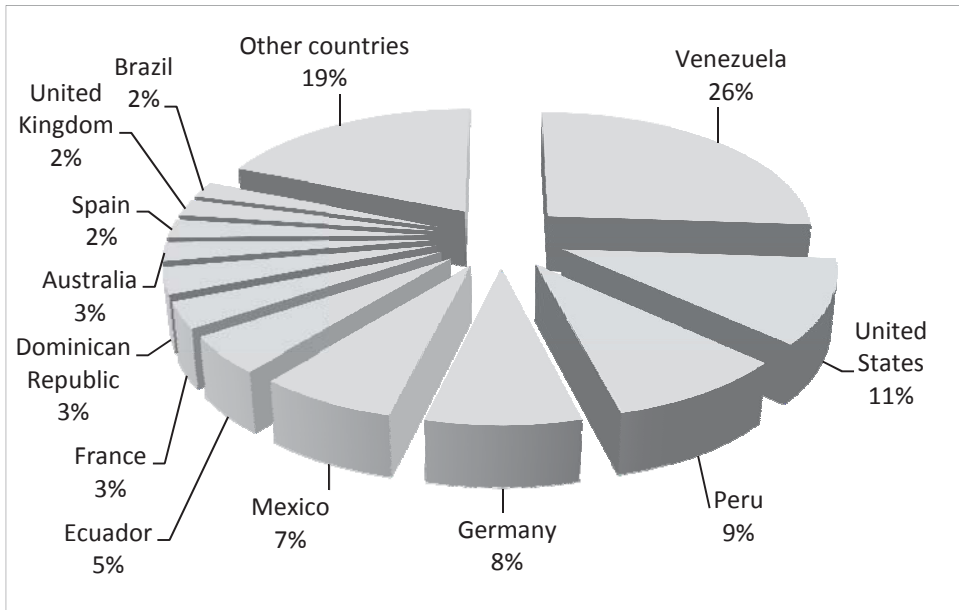
Table 6.4 Foreign students by selected countries of origin enrolled in tertiary education in OECD and partner countries, 2008

Rank	Country of origin	Number of students
1	China	510 842
2	India	184 801
3	South Korea	115 464
4	Germany	94 408
5	Turkey	65 459
6	France	63 081
7	Russia	58 983
8	Japan	52 849
9	United States	52 328
10	Malaysia	51 434
14	Canada	45 157
25	United Kingdom	28 712
26	Mexico	28 627
28	Brazil	27 571
34	Spain	24 983
38	Colombia	23 306
41	Cameron	20 317

Source: OECD *Education at a Glance 2010*, reported by Macready and Tucker (2011).

As regards foreign students enrolled in Colombian tertiary institutions, data from SNIES 2010 indicates that there were 1 457 such students, mostly from Venezuela, the United States, Peru, Germany and Mexico (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Countries of origin of foreign students enrolled in Colombian tertiary education institutions, 2010



Source: Calculations by the authors based on SNIES data corresponding to 2010.

Limited information exists on the mobility of academic staff. The ASCUN-RCI 2006 Survey reports that 72% of RCI participants in the study had their academic staff conducting some type of academic activity abroad. In 2006, a total of 2 127 faculty members from Colombian institutions participating in the study conducted international activities (ASCUN, 2007). In addition, at least in the case of the United States – a major recipient of worldwide visiting scholars – Colombia ranks consistently among the top 30 sending countries, surpassed in South America only by Brazil and Argentina (Table 6.5).

As can be seen from the previous information on students and scholars, it is evident that some institutions in Colombia have advanced significantly in the establishment of inter-institutional relationships with a wide variety of peer institutions and specialised agencies from abroad, and in the development of local expertise in handling the many logistical, legal, and financial aspects required to both send abroad and receive from abroad students and academic staff. It is encouraging to see that there is growing interest on the part of government entities, foreign governments, and specialised agencies in increasing opportunities for more international mobility of students and academic staff to and from Colombia.

Table 6.5 Top countries of origin of visiting international scholars in the United States

Rank	Country	2008/2009	% of total	2001/2002	% change 2008/2001
1	China	26 645	23.1	15 624	70.5
2	India	10 814	9.5	6 249	73.1
3	South Korea	9 975	8.8	7 143	39.6
4	Japan	5 635	5.0	5 736	-1.8
5	Germany	5 300	4.7	5 028	5.4
6	Canada	4 692	4.1	3 905	20.2
7	France	4 171	3.7	2 985	39.7
8	Italy	3 548	3.1	2 257	57.2
9	United Kingdom	2 846	2.5	3 314	-14.1
10	Spain	2 481	2.2	1 822	36.2
11	Brazil	2 363	2.1	1 493	58.3
16	Mexico	1 371	1.2	1 068	28.4
19	Argentina	991	0.9	837	18.4
26	Colombia	684	0.6	514	33.1
	World	113 494	100.0	86 015	

Source: IIE (2011) (2003), Open Doors.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts and good intentions it is fair to say that, by international standards, international student and faculty mobility in Colombia is extremely low.

In the case of student mobility, institutions face important barriers to establishing sound mobility initiatives that may benefit larger number of students. These include financial limitations, uneven exchange programmes, limited linguistic proficiency and academic and visa regulations. Some of these are discussed below.

An important assumption in the establishment of international exchange programmes with foreign institutions, especially in the case of undergraduate students participating in reciprocal schemes, is that students will flow in both directions. Colombian higher education institutions have had to contend with the country's negative image abroad for its level of insecurity and violence, which limits the institutions' capacity to attract foreign students and, consequently, to send Colombian students abroad. Also, the fact that the great majority of Colombian institutions do not offer regular academic courses in English means that they can only attract foreign students already fluent in Spanish, or students interested in learning Spanish.

Another important challenge faced by institutions – especially those serving students with limited economic resources – is the lack of financial support to help students meet the costs associated with travelling and staying abroad. Although ICETEX plays an important role in providing financial aid, still the financial factor constitutes a critical limitation, triggering other problems such as discouraging the award of visas by foreign governments.

Also, the limited proficiency of the majority of students in a second language, as described before in this chapter, becomes an important barrier for students thinking about studying abroad in countries in which a language other than Spanish is used for instruction.

Finally, at least in some institutions visited by the review team, students indicated that those who have studied abroad confront difficulties in having their academic credits being properly recognised upon their return to Colombia.

To sum up, international mobility of students and academic staff is an essential part of the internationalisation of higher education in Colombia. When such mobility is strategically and properly handled, a limited number of participating students and scholars can have a much wider effect in internationalising the outlook of peers unable to travel abroad.

The review team recommends bringing together the efforts of institutions, employers, international agencies and government entities to launch a carefully designed initiative aimed at dramatically increasing the number of Colombian students and scholars participating in international mobility, as well as increasing the number of foreign students and scholars coming to Colombia.

A major initiative on these lines will need the active involvement of stakeholders. It will require willingness on the part of tertiary institutions to modify their academic offerings and processes where necessary, to make human and logistical infrastructure available, to train and professionalise institutional practitioners, to involve the business sector, to use financial resources as incentives to the development of partnerships with international peers, to support targeted marketing campaigns abroad, to participate actively in relevant networks, to develop financial aid mechanisms to support students and scholars travelling abroad, and to make necessary changes in academic credit recognition processes.

Other regions and countries have adopted a range of innovative policies and schemes to increase student and academic staff mobility; Colombia could study and learn from these examples.

A final important element in decisions related to academic mobility and internationalisation of higher education, both at government and at institutional level, is high quality, consistent, reliable and easily available information on these subjects.

The Ministry of National Education is recommended to further develop, expand and make available to the public the data on SNIES related to internationalisation of Colombian tertiary education institutions.

Supporting Colombians to study advanced degrees abroad

Historically, the Colombian government and society have invested considerable financial resources to support talented Colombians to conduct advanced graduate studies in selected higher education institutions abroad. In the United States during the 2009/10 academic year a total of 3 113 out of the 6 920 Colombians enrolled in US higher education institutions were postgraduate students, making Colombia the third largest Latin American sending country after Mexico with 3 911 and Brazil with 3 121 (IIE, 2010). Many of the Colombian students conducting graduate education abroad are financially supported by COLCIENCIAS, COLFUTURO or ICETEX either separately or jointly, and/or supported by scholarships provided by foreign governments or institutions. Current plans are to continue these arrangements and to increase the overall numbers.

COLCIENCIAS, for example, has established an ambitious goal of supporting the preparation of 3 600 new PhDs in strategic areas by 2019 – a good number of them abroad – to help meet Colombia’s need for advanced human resources for research and innovation. COLCIENCIAS has also implemented initiatives to attract recent doctoral graduates to Colombian companies, to follow up Colombian graduate students abroad and to establishing communication channels with highly trained Colombians living abroad (COLCIENCIAS, 2011).

COLFUTURO, since its inception in 1992, has supported a total of 904 Colombians studying for a doctoral degree abroad. In total 4 998 Colombians have received support through COLFUTURO for graduate studies abroad between 1992 and 2011. They have studied in the United States (33%), United Kingdom (22%), Spain (8%), France (7%), Germany (6%), Netherlands (5%), Italy (5%), Australia (5%), Canada (3%) and other countries (COLFUTURO, 2011).

COLFUTURO has its critics, but it has had remarkable success in a relatively short time. In recent years, it has made efforts to support more Colombians living outside Bogota, more graduates of public universities and more students from lower socio-economic strata. These efforts should continue.

One issue around the scope of COLFUTURO's work is that, as a business-backed private entity, COLFUTURO has been willing to support any discipline or field of study for which talented applicants have requested support. Yet an important funding source for the scholarships COLFUTURO administers is the government, through COLCIENCIAS. There is a legitimate public interest in ensuring that public funds support study abroad in fields aligned with the areas of strategic interest for the development of the country. The COLFUTURO approach does not seem particularly well articulated with the achievement of national goals of advancing human capital development in these strategic areas.

By contrast, the support programmes of COLCIENCIAS and ICETEX could better take account of the strategic areas and their international dimension and improve articulation with institutional priorities. It is therefore desirable to achieve a more co-ordinated approach between COLCIENCIAS/ICETEX and the higher education and research institutions as regards scholarship programmes for graduate studies abroad. The review team suggests that they co-ordinate to launch institution-based development strategies for graduate and research programmes in areas of strategic national interest, which could involve both faculty mobility and scholarship-funded student mobility.

The review team recommends greater co-ordination between COLCIENCIAS and ICETEX on the one hand and higher education and research institutions on the other, to develop mutually-agreed scholarship programmes for graduate studies abroad, particularly in study fields of strategic national interest.

Summary of recommendations

The review team recommends that:

- An overall comprehensive approach to internationalisation should be introduced, bearing in mind that the approach adopted should contribute to the relevance of higher education, to the success of graduates of institutions, and, ultimately, to the incorporation of Colombian tertiary institutions into the global knowledge-based economy.

- In future, national policy discussions and consideration of legal changes should include the international dimension of tertiary education, and that there should be specific programmes to implement policies in this area.
- The Ministry of National Education should develop the quality assurance system so as to encourage tertiary institutions to consider introducing international elements into the curricula of all academic programmes, and other programmes where relevant.
- The Ministry of National Education should commission an external evaluation of the National Bilingual Programme in order to establish its effectiveness, and define a course of action with concrete achievable goals in terms of proper second language competency for all graduates of tertiary education institutions.
- Tertiary institutions should work more effectively with previous levels of education and on the organisation of their own programmes, to boost the chances of all graduates concluding their undergraduate studies with functional competency in a second language. Second language competency should be embedded as an integral part of the regular curriculum in all academic programmes and, where relevant, other programmes, rather than just being a requirement for graduation.
- Institutions, employers, international agencies and government entities should work together to dramatically increase the number of Colombian students and scholars participating in international mobility, as well as increasing the number of foreign students and scholars coming to Colombia.
- The Ministry of National Education should further develop, expand and make available to the public the data on SNIES related to internationalisation of Colombian tertiary education institutions.
- There should be greater co-ordination between COLCIENCIAS and ICETEX on the one hand and higher education and research institutions on the other, to develop mutually-agreed scholarship programmes for graduate studies abroad, particularly in study fields of strategic national interest.

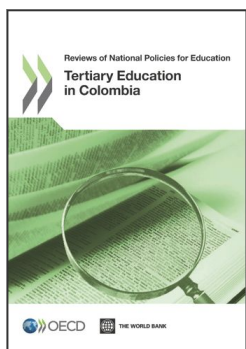
Notes

1. In both cases, the 2006 RCI-ASCUN Survey and the 2010 SNIES data, it is assumed that the information reported corresponds to regular students abroad on a temporary basis and, consequently, does not include full-degree-seeking students abroad and/or Colombian students enrolled in foreign institutions and not affiliated with a domestic Colombian institution.
2. See previous footnote for clarification about the type of students being considered and the apparent dissonance with respect to the number reported in Colombia.

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