



WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION AND
DATA ON MOBILITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

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Brief update to the BFUG Board January 2007

Summary of the terms of reference of the Working Group (WG) on Social Dimension and Data on the Mobility of Staff and Students in Participating Countries:

- to define the concept of social dimension based on the ministerial communiqués of the Bologna Process
- to present comparable data on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries
- to present comparable data on the mobility of staff and students
- to prepare proposals as a basis for future stocktaking

The work of the WG¹ was presented at the BFUG meeting on October 12 2006 in Helsinki. For both issues – social dimension and mobility – recommendations for continued work at national level and BFUG level were proposed and for the social dimension a strategic objective for the social dimension was put forward for discussion.

At the BFUG meeting there was broad support for the suggested strategic approach, subject to some further refinement of the overall objective. The strategy should focus on the policy remit of Higher Education Ministers. The WG would rely on data collected by international organisations. Further consideration of stocktaking in this area would only be possible once comparable data were available.

Two WG meetings have been held after the BFUG meeting. At the last one on December 19 2006 in Luxemburg a draft final report was discussed. One or two WG meetings remain. The subgroup on data collection will have its final meeting on January 24 2007. The subgroup consists of representatives of countries and organisations in the WG and of Eurostudent, Eurostat, Eurydice, LIS (Luxemburg Income Study) and Switzerland.

¹ Composition of the Working Group: Austria, Bosnia Hercegovina, Croatia, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Russia, Sweden, UK, EUA, EI – Pan European Structure and ESIB.

Final report

A draft final report will be presented to the BFUG before its meeting in Berlin on March 5-6 2007. The suggested outline for the treatment of both issues – the social dimension and mobility – in the report is as follows:

1. Preamble and introduction to the work of the WG
2. Rationale
3. Commitments already made in the official Bologna documents
4. Current situation and data available (system descriptors and data)
5. Actions to strengthen the social dimension/promote mobility
6. Recommendations from the Working Group

The work on recommendations has not been finalised, but we have a number of preliminary suggestions that follow on the ones proposed to and generally supported by the BFUG at its October meeting in Helsinki.

Social dimension

The WG proposes that an overall objective for the social dimension should be agreed by the ministers, but that the means for reaching the objective should be adapted to national circumstances. The overall objective should reflect the importance of equal opportunities for access to and participation in quality higher education as well as widening access to and participation in quality higher education. It should also reflect the importance of ensuring successful completion of the studies. The WG suggests the following overall objective to be agreed by the Ministers:

We strive for the societal goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of our populations. We therefore pledge to take action to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.

The WG also has a number of suggestions for measures to support the development towards the overall objective:

Measures at national level

- To report to the BFUG by 2009 on national strategies for the social dimension, including action plans and measures to show their impact. All stakeholders should actively participate in and support this work at the national level.
- To collect student survey data with the aim to provide comparable data concerning the social dimension.

Measures at BFUG level

- To address the identified data gaps and continue developing established contacts with data and information providers.

- The BFUG should also entrust one of these providers with enhancing the comparability and reliability of data across the EHEA, recognising that the data should be complemented by contextualized information. There needs to be regular contact between the chosen provider and the BFUG.
- To give overview of the work on strategies and action plans carried out in participating countries in order to exchange experiences.

Mobility

The WG also has a number of suggestions for measures to support the development of mobility:

Measures at national level

- To report by 2009 on the actions taken at national level to remove obstacles to in-coming and out-going mobility of students and staff and to promote the benefits of periods of studying and teaching abroad.
- To encourage and strengthen the national efforts to remove legal, administrative, financial, linguistic, cultural and other obstacles to mobility for students and staff.
- To focus on the main national challenges in order to promote mobility, such as the delivery of visas and work permits, the full implementation of established recognition procedures and creating incentives for mobility for both individuals and higher education institutions.
- To address the institutional attitude towards and responsibility for mobility. This includes making mobility an institutional responsibility and
- To facilitate mobility through strengthening the social dimension of mobile students and staff.

Measures at BFUG level

- To address the identified data gaps.
- To continue developing established contacts with data and information providers.
- The BFUG should also entrust one of these providers with enhancing the comparability and reliability of data across the EHEA on actual mobility.
- The BFUG should also consider how best to overcome the obstacles to mobility of staff. This could be done through establishing a working group to identify obstacles for mobility of staff and ways to overcome them before the ministerial meeting in 2009.

Meeting Schedule for the WG in 2007

6 February, London

6 March, post BFUG in Berlin (optional)