BFUG10 4B

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

Interim report to the BFUG March 2007

This interim report is a summary of the draft final report prepared by the Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility of Staff and Students (henceforth referred to as the WG) and presents the preliminary conclusions of the WG. The WG seeks the agreement of the BFUG on the proposed recommendations to the ministers.

1. Introduction

At the ministerial meeting in Bergen in 2005 two of the topics that the ministers wanted to carry forward were the social dimension of higher education and mobility of staff and students. The tasks concerning the social dimension and mobility were by the BFUG agreed to be taken forward by appointing a joint working group. The WG also established a subgroup with the task to collect and explore data.

The terms of reference for the WG were agreed by the BFUG in November 2005 and could be summarized as follows:
- 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 social dimension has been an integral part of the Bologna Process since the first ministerial follow-up meeting in Prague in 2001. The social dimension was included in the Prague Communiqué upon suggestion from the student representatives at the meeting.

Mobility of staff and students was one of the key objectives when the Bologna Process was established. As a consequence most of the common political commitments made within the Bologna Process aim at promoting mobility.

Members of the Working Group
The following countries have been represented in the WG:

Austria
Bosnia Herzegovina
Croatia
France
Ireland
Luxemburg
Russia
Sweden
UK

The following organisations have been represented:
EUA (European University Association)
EI (Education International) – Pan European Structure
ESIB (the National Unions of Students in Europe)

The following organisations and countries have been represented in the subgroup:
Eurostat
Eurydice
Eurostudent
Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)
EUA
ESIB
Austria
France
Switzerland
United Kingdom

2. Social Dimension

The WG was given the task to define the concept of social dimension based on the ministerial communiqués of the Bologna Process and has come to the conclusion that the social dimension should not be defined once and for all. The social dimension is the process leading to participative equity in higher education. This process will be different depending on the country and individuals involved. The WG shows what the social dimension could and should be about through explaining why we should work with the social dimension and what we are aiming at.

2.1 Rationale for the social dimension

Strengthening the social dimension is key to enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area. It will foster social cohesion, reduce inequalities, raise the level of competencies in society and maximise the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge society.

The rationale behind the social dimension of higher education is according to the WG at least three-fold:
1, Firstly, it is a question of equal opportunity. All individuals should have equal opportunities to take advantage of higher education leading to personal development, preparation for sustainable employment and life as an active citizen.

2, Secondly, opening up higher education and widening access creates prospects for reinforced social, cultural and economic development of our societies. Education is vital for sustainable economic growth, which is a prerequisite for a stable and wealthy society.

3, Thirdly, a strong social dimension enhances the quality of higher education and the attractiveness of European higher education. With equal access opportunities and an active and questioning approach from the students different perspectives meet, challenge and develop the academic culture.

2.2 Means of transforming political commitments into actions

There are a number of political commitments concerning the social dimension already made in the official Bologna Documents. The commitments are to a large extent general, stating for example that "students should have appropriate studying and living conditions, so that they can complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background".

In order to implement the commitments made and to collect data for the social dimension the concept needs to be turned into a series of actions. The WG has identified a number of areas that could be considered the core of the social dimension and that would deliver these commitments:

Measures to promote equal opportunities

Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education

Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience
A, Provision of academic services
B, Provision of social services

Student participation in the governance and organization of higher education

Finances in order to start and complete studies

The above areas have guided the mapping and collection of data concerning the social dimension and the discussion on stocktaking in this area.

2.3 Data on the social dimension

To ensure the highest degree of reliability and comparability of the data assessed, the working group has analyzed data collected by international organizations that work according to internationally agreed standards and definitions.

Given the discussion in the WG on the core areas of the social dimension, data and indicators in the following domains have been explored:
- Widening access
- Study framework and financial situation
- Completion of studies

It has become apparent that there is no comprehensive survey for the social dimension of education as such. The surveys of the international organizations can nevertheless deliver valuable information. The different international data providers deliver data or information from several Bologna countries on new entry rates, enrolment by age and sex, the share of students entering via second chance routes, social make-up of the student body, institutional initiatives to improve access, the provision of accommodation and other services, student income sources and expenditures, fees and support schemes, student work load, public-private funding and on the educational attainment of the total population, also by field of study. Some of this data will be presented in the final report.

It is, however, apparent that there are several important data gaps:
- not all participating countries are covered,
- the perspectives change according to the initial objective of the international organisations and
- there is no common deadline for publication.

Information from national reports
The only information on the social dimension for all countries available are the national reports. This information, however, is not comparable since we so far have no common understanding of what the social dimension is and the questions to the countries in the template for the national reports were very open.

The WG has summarized the information from the national reports in order to give some indication of the actions taken to strengthen the social dimension of higher education:

1, Describe any measures being taken in your country to widen access to quality higher education
There is a growing recognition of the need to address equity issues. The most common measures are financial support measures such as grants and loans and scholarships, exemptions from fees, housing assistance, incentives for HEIs, monitoring by the state, premia for under represented groups, targets for access set and the publication of performance indicators.

2, Describe any measures to help students complete their studies without obstacles related to their social or economic background
This area was not addressed as systematically as the first question. Nevertheless, there is evidence of work to improve completion rates such as the provision of guidance and counselling services, financial support for students, scholarships based on merits, provision of student welfare services, tutorial and mentoring support and monitoring of the development.

3, Describe the arrangements for involving students (and staff trade union/representative bodies) in the governance of HEIs
The question about student involvement in the governance of higher education institutions was not included under the social dimension heading in the national report template. However, the possibility to influence you own situation when in higher education is a basis for a social dimension and the WG has chosen to include this element as well. Almost all countries have legislation in place to ensure student participation in the governance of higher education institutions. Many set a ratio for the number of students; this ranges from 10 percent to a third. Most also have arrangements in place to involve students in national governing or advisory bodies. Students are also routinely engaged in quality assurance in a number of countries. Some countries are considering how they might increase student involvement further.

2.4 Recommendations from the Working Group

Strategic objective for the social dimension
There are considerable differences and challenges in relation to the social dimension of higher education between the participating countries. This needs to be acknowledged in the further development of the social dimension within the Process. The WG has found that it is not appropriate to narrowly define the social dimension or suggest a number of detailed actions that might be difficult or inappropriate to deliver for all countries involved. Instead, the WG proposes that an overall objective for the social dimension should be agreed by the Ministers. The WG suggests the following overall objective:

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.

While committing to the same objective, the means for reaching the objective should be adapted to national priorities and circumstances. The WG also wants to start a process towards achieving this objective and proposes that each country develops strategies for the social dimension.

The WG has come to the conclusion that the collection of social dimension data needs to go beyond the present Bologna Process stocktaking method. Data on the social dimension should comprise system descriptors as well as information on how these systems work and not be narrowed down to stocktaking indicators. The data gathered must be reliable and comparable and measure progress in relation to the overall political objective for the social dimension.

Recommendations for continued work
The WG suggest a two-fold approach to support the development towards the overall objective. Actions should be taken at national as well as European level in order to strengthen the social dimension and to enhance our knowledge of the social and economic situation of students:

Measures at national and institutional level
- By 2009 the countries should report to the BFUG 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.
- Student survey data should be collected with the aim to provide comparable data concerning the social dimension.

Measures at BFUG level
- The BFUG should entrust Eurostat, in conjunction with Eurostudent, with a mandate to provide comparable and reliable data to follow up the development towards the overall objective for all Bologna countries. Data should cover participative equity in higher education as well as employability. This task should be overseen by the BFUG and a report should be submitted for the 2009 ministerial meeting.

3. Mobility

3.1 Rationale for mobility

Mobility is at the core of the Bologna Process and a key to enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

According to the WG promoting mobility creates opportunities for:
1, Personal growth
To experience another country and study environment gives the individual a new cultural, social and academic experience and creates opportunities for personal growth. This enhances employability and possibilities to take advantage of an international labour market.

2, Developing international co-operation and understanding between individuals and institutions
Through co-operation and mobile individuals higher education institutions gain new insights that challenge established traditions and practices and lead to a better understanding of other systems and practices. Mobile individuals also provide an internationalised environment for those not mobile.

3, Enhancing the quality of higher education and research
Through mobile individuals, in-coming and outgoing students as well as staff, higher education institutions gain new insights that challenge established traditions and practices. Mobility thereby provides possibilities for the development of academic work through new contacts and ideas as well as an opportunity for comparison and benchmarking between systems.

4, Responding to the needs of European societies
The experiences of mobile individuals are brought into society and contributes to society. Individuals with experience of other countries will help to reduce prejudices and cultural as well as language barriers between people, countries and cultures. Trans-national exchanges provide both cooperative and competitive advantages for society and will enforce strives for change and improvement in society.

3.2 Capturing Mobility

The WG suggests that a wide definition of mobility that covers all forms of mobility in a global perspective should be used within the Bologna Process. The countries within the Bologna Process should continue to strive for a EHEA where students and staff can be truly mobile, but there should be a reasonable balance of mobility flows.

The WG has created a definition of mobility for the purposes of the work within the WG. In the view of the WG it is no longer appropriate, in our multi-cultural societies, to use nationality as a statistical basis for mobility. The WG definition covers all forms and lengths of mobility within higher education and it is not limited to mobility within the EHEA:

Mobility of students: Refers to a study period in another country than that of prior permanent residence or prior education (completed or ongoing) for a period of studies or a full degree.

Mobility of staff: Refers to a working period in another country than that of prior permanent residence or prior employment (terminated or ongoing) for a limited or extended period.

3.3 Means of transforming political commitments into actions

Within the Bologna Process the Ministers have agreed to implement a number of actions to facilitate mobility such as the creation of easily readable and comparable degrees, the adoption of a system based on three main cycles and an overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, the use of a system of credits (ECTS) for the transfer and accumulation of credits throughout the EHEA, to enable the portability of national loans and grants, to facilitate the delivery of visa and work permits and to encourage participation in mobility programmes.

Other commitments within the Process either relate to the promotion of mobility in a less visible way or are expressed in a more general manner such as to overcome "obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement" or the emphasis on the social dimension of mobility. The WG has identified core areas of action to promote mobility that have not yet been as developed as the above-mentioned actions and agreements.

Information, transparency and preparation (equal opportunities for mobility)

Active action for widened access to mobility opportunities

Information, administration and services in the hosting country

Financing mobility

Welfare systems and labour market regulations

Among the obstacles to mobility, issues related to immigration, recognition and lack of financial incentives are some of the most commonly observed problem areas. A particular area of concern is the issuing of visas.

3.4 Data on mobility of students and staff

Student mobility
There is a general consensus around what mobility is but it has not lead to consensus about mobility statistics. Today data are scarce and those that are there show significant weaknesses in giving a full picture of mobility. The report *EURODATA – Student mobility in European higher education* by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) from 2006 shows that the most comprehensive data base available does not register genuine mobility, but rather the number of foreign students in a number of Bologna countries.

There are several problems with using nationality as the basis for mobility statistics:
- A substantial number of people move to other countries already at an early stage and attend both school and universities in a country different from their nationality.
- Some individuals live abroad and return to their home country to study.
- An increasing number of students also cross several borders in the course of their studies.

So far, the majority of countries have only data on inwards mobility (mainly based on nationality), while outwards mobility can only be captured by adding up the nationalities of foreign students in the other countries of the world. In addition, in the most recent international statistical collection students studying abroad for a period up to and including one year are excluded. International statistics also only cover mobility at a given moment in time and does not capture all mobility during the course of studies. There is, however, a development towards increased comparability of data on genuine mobility.

Staff mobility
We might say the same thing about staff mobility as about student mobility – it is fairly easy to agree what it is, but difficult to agree on how to capture it in statistics. The WG has not collected data on the mobility of staff since there is no commonly accepted definition to use. As has also been shown by Conor Cradden in his report *Constructing Paths to Staff Mobility in the European Higher Education Area: from Individual to Institutional Responsibility* (2007) any kind of statistics on staff mobility are difficult to come by, let alone information that would permit comparisons between countries.

To sum up there are several data gaps concerning the mobility of student and staff:
- Information available on students but hardly any on staff
- No data for all Bologna countries
- No comparable data on genuine student mobility
- No comparable data on staff mobility

Information from national reports
The WG has summarized the information from the national reports in order to give some indication of the actions taken to promote student mobility in higher education. The questions were:

1, Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to student mobility and promote the full use of mobility programmes
At present, the main focus is on participation in international exchange programmes. According to the WG it is clear that there is room for improvement and that measures related to the national systems in place need to be considered. We have seen some positive examples of promoting mobility as part of the national regulatory and financial framework, such as taking mobility into account in funding formulae for higher education.

2, Are portable loans and grants available in your country? If not, describe any measures being taken to increase the portability of grants and loans
Over 50 percent of Bologna countries have some form of portability within their student support system. Some 12 countries already have fully portable grants or loans in place. A further four are considering introducing fully portable student support systems. More limited portability is in place in a significant number of counties.

3, Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to staff mobility and promote the full use of mobility programmes
Staff mobility does not appear to be an area of particular concern. According to the WG, less action is shown in this area than for student mobility. There is room for improvement and measures to promote staff mobility within the national systems need to be considered. At large, mobility for researchers seem to pose less problems than teacher mobility, partly because of better funding schemes for trans-national research cooperation.

3.5 Recommendations from the Working Group

The promotion of mobility of students and staff is at the core of the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process countries should strive for *a EHEA where students and staff can be truly mobile*. However, the participating countries face challenges both concerning mobility as such and finding comparable and reliable data on mobility.

The WG has come to the conclusion that in order to find and compare mobility data we need to go beyond the present Bologna Process stocktaking method. It is important to follow-up the development of mobility for students and staff since it is one of the core elements of the Bologna Process and a measurement of its success. Today data are scarce. There is no data for all Bologna countries, no comparable data on genuine student mobility and hardly any data on staff mobility.

To meet these challenges the WG suggest a two-fold approach. Actions should be taken at national as well as European level in order to promote mobility and to increase our knowledge of the mobility flows of students and staff:

Measures at national and institutional level
- By 2009 the countries should report to the BFUG on actions taken at national level to remove obstacles to and promote the benefits of mobility of students and staff, including measures to assess their impact at a future date.
- Countries should focus on the main national challenges: 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.
- The institutional attitude towards and responsibility for mobility should be addressed. This includes making mobility an institutional responsibility.
- Mobility should be facilitated through strengthening the social dimension of mobile students and staff.
- The development of joint programmes as one way of enhancing trust between countries and institutions should be supported.

Measures at BFUG level
- The collection of data on mobility of staff and students needs to go beyond the present stocktaking method. The BFUG should entrust Eurostat, in conjunction with Eurostudent, with a mandate to provide comparable and reliable data on actual mobility across the EHEA.
- The BFUG should also consider how best to overcome the obstacles to mobility of staff. Progress in this work should be reported for the ministerial meeting in 2009.