

Working Group 2 On Implementation

Meeting Tbilisi 3 June 2016

Social Dimension

Commitments in the Yerevan Communiqué:

Recognition

- to remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programmes and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning, as well as encouraging higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning;

Social dimension

- to make our higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy

Key questions for the WG:

1. What are the key determining characteristics and indicators of an inclusive higher education system: participation ratios, academic success, the feeling of belonging, ... ?
2. What are the policy pointers to be considered?
3. What could/should be the main areas on which higher education policy have to place its focus: teaching and learning, modes of delivery, quality assurance, professional development of staff; student support, ..?
4. What kind of policy instruments would be effective or successful to realize the objectives of the social dimension: funding, regulations, performance agreements, quality assurance, student financing?
5. The links between the social dimension and other areas such as lifelong learning, flexible higher education, recognition of prior learning, ..
6. Is there any qualitative evidence on what works and what doesn't work (supporting facts, examples, surveys, case studies, stories of experiences, ..)?
7. What are the perspectives of the different partners and interest groups?

From the Implementation report:

Conclusions with regard LLL

Lifelong Learning continues to be a challenging concept and one which needs to be broken down into different elements in order to compare realities across countries. Although recent years have seen dramatic economic and social changes to the higher education landscape and have accentuated the need to develop lifelong learning provision, evidence of major structural changes or national action to respond to such challenges is difficult to find. More commonly, institutions are adapting existing provision to meet new and developing needs.

Lifelong learning is a recognised mission in all higher institutions in most of the EHEA countries. Moreover, higher education institutions have a well-established flexible course provision in many countries, offering various types of distance- and e-learning, in addition to part-time studies. Even though not all countries have an official part-time status for higher education students, students may have *de facto* part-time status while theoretically studying full time.

Financing of lifelong learning is fragmented, but the majority of funding in many countries comes from the general public education budget, with additional funding from private contributions from students and businesses. In most countries part-time students do not make higher contributions to the cost of their education than full-time students, although in eight countries they do. Moreover, the financial support for part-time students is in some countries more limited than for their full-time counterparts.

Indeed the two issues are often related as in some countries where part-time students need to make higher financial contributions; the support they receive is lower or does not exist. Hence, in these

countries there are no financial incentives to study part-time, so students wishing to study more flexibly may find it difficult to do so.

The concept of lifelong learning is rarely well defined in operational terms in EHEA countries, and where definitions exist, they are in many cases rather vague and they vary across countries. Therefore, it is important to take into account the limitations of lifelong learning as a concept through which the demands of 'new learners' are examined. Adults, or mature students, are often considered as learners whose needs often demand specific solutions when designing study paths. When analysing the challenges of new learners, more emphasis could be placed on how education systems deal with the needs of adult learners, while at the same time taking into account the lifelong learning framework.

Conclusions with regard the Social dimension

Drawing upon statistical data, the results of the BFUG questionnaire and the latest Eurostudent report, this chapter has focused on the social dimension of the Bologna Process and its goal that the student body should reflect the diversity of the populations and that the background of students should not have an impact on their participation in and attainment of higher education. While some progress can be noted, the analysis clearly shows that the goal of providing equal opportunities to quality higher education is far from being reached.

With regard to gender, some imbalances have reduced over time but nevertheless continue to exist in most countries and across the EHEA as a whole. Women are overrepresented in the total student population and in new entrants in nearly all countries.

At the level of doctoral education the picture is mixed: in four countries the shares of men and women entering doctoral education are more or less equal; in 12 countries men are underrepresented, in countries women are underrepresented. The shares of women entering doctoral education vary from 41 % in Turkey to 60 % in Iceland.

The greatest gender imbalances exist, however, between different fields of study. In some fields, such as teacher training or social services, men are strongly underrepresented. In other fields, such as computing or engineering, women are strongly underrepresented. Policies aimed at achieving gender balance in higher education are therefore likely to be most effective if they take study-field-specific imbalances into account.

Another central concern of the social dimension is whether immigrants and children of immigrants have the same chances to participate in and attain higher education as native students. Such information is, however, much more difficult to gather, which is why the present chapter uses data on foreign-born students as proxy. This data shows very clearly that in nearly all countries, an immigration background is negatively associated with higher education attainment. Foreign-born young adults are more likely to quit education and training at an early stage and less likely to participate in tertiary education than their native-born counterparts.

Similarly, the educational background of parents continues to have an impact on tertiary education attainment. In all EHEA countries for which data is available, children of medium educated parents have much lower chances to attain tertiary education than children of highly educated parents.

Being aware of those (and other) imbalances, almost all higher education systems reflect the objective of widening participation in their higher education policy and more than 70 % of the systems claim to do so through a set of concrete measures.

Despite the commitment in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué of 2009 to set 'measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the [...] decade' (20), less than 20 % of the systems have defined quantitative objectives with a reference to underrepresented groups. More common are targets for increasing overall participation – 30 of the 48 systems for which data is available have at least one such target, in most cases related to the European Union's Europe 2020 strategy and its target that by 2020 at least 40 % of young people (aged 30-34) should have completed tertiary or equivalent education. However, whether increasing overall participation will also result in a more balanced composition of the student body remains to be seen.

In more than 90 % of the higher education systems in the EHEA the composition of the student body is subject to some kind of systematic monitoring. In many cases, however, the monitoring covers only a limited number of characteristics, such as age, gender and type and level of qualification achieved prior to entry to higher education. Other characteristics, such as disability, migrant status or labour market status prior to entry to higher education, are monitored to a much lesser degree. To be able to identify underrepresented groups and to assess whether measures to widen participation in higher education have the desired effect, it may be advisable for the monitoring of the composition of the student body to take into account a wider range of characteristics related to the social dimension goal and also to establish a closer link between monitoring and policy-making.

As far as alternative access to higher education is concerned, the overall picture across the EHEA looks very similar to the situation described in the previous implementation report. In 22 higher education systems (most of them in Western Europe) at least one such alternative route to higher education exists, while in the remaining 25 systems for which data is available access to higher education still depends on the possession of an upper secondary school leaving certificate (general or vocational).

Concerning the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning some progress can be noted but still a lot of work remains to be done, with regard to policies, procedures, implementation and monitoring. Currently, there is hardly any data on how many students / candidates are actually participating in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and are exempted from some or all higher education programme requirements. The same goes for access via alternative routes more generally.

Academic and/or career guidance services are commonly provided by higher education institutions in all 48 higher education systems for which data is available. In two-thirds of the systems, higher education institutions provide psychological guidance services as well. Special services for students with disabilities also exist in a number of cases. In all systems for which information is available, support services are not only offered to enrolled students but also to prospective students. While this wide-spread existence of student services is certainly a positive development, the available data does not allow the quality and effectiveness of the services provided to be assessed, nor the extent to which services are accessible to all students.

Fees and financial support systems have been relatively stable within the EHEA, with no major changes in the general direction of approaches, the share of household contributions or public expenditure on student support. Fees (tuition and administrative fees combined) are widespread, with only seven education systems not levying any student contributions. Yet, there is a large variation between higher education systems regarding the proportion of students paying fees (from

nearly no one to everyone) as well as the amount of fees they need to pay (from nearly zero to more than 100 % of the GDP per capita). Countries also rely on different combinations of forms of student support, and the proportion of students receiving such support also varies widely. In general, first cycle students tend to receive more public support than students studying in the second cycle. In the third cycle, as a result of different statuses of doctoral candidates in EHEA countries, fees and support systems are even more diverse.

From the Social Dimension working group report:

Access

TG on Access, composed of the SD&LLL WG's representative of Austria, ESU and PL4SD, was set up to single out initiatives to improve access to quality higher education for underrepresented groups through examining, in particular, the results of the PL4SD project and Expanding Opportunities (ExpandO) project¹⁶ with the overarching aim to develop guidelines for national access plans/strategies.

The 2012 Bologna Process Implementation Report¹⁷, initial results of the PL4SD, ExpandO, and the discussions held at the SD&LLL WG meetings came to evidence that nearly all the EHEA countries are engaged in the improvement of the social dimension of higher education. Across the EHEA there are various mechanisms to financially support students in need, be it in the form of a grant system, support for the families of students, reduction of fees or indirect support through subsidising student canteens, dormitories, transport or health costs. Moreover, all member countries have policies of antidiscrimination and special regulations for underprivileged groups, e.g. students with disabilities. Student counselling and career guidance are also well established in the majority of higher education systems in the EHEA.

However, it became evident that very few member countries had integrated all their measures into a coherent strategy, which would rely from one side upon a systematic approach of identifying barriers into and within the higher education system and from the other side upon relevant data providing evidence for action.

In this light, a set of guidelines were developed to accompany “Widening Participation for Equity and Growth - A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the EHEA to 2020”. The aim of the guidelines is to assist countries to meet the challenge of developing or enhancing national plans or strategies. These guidelines were developed to provide a “roadmap” for member countries in order to ensure that national plans or strategies are developed using a systematic approach to identifying barriers into and within the higher education system, based on relevant data providing evidence for action.

Teaching and learning

TG on Teaching and Learning (T&L), composed of the WG representatives of Lithuania, Norway, EI, ESU, and EUA, aimed at producing recommendations on T&L, in particular, how T&L can improve completion rates of underrepresented groups and the quality of higher education in general, how it

can support mature and/or returning students. Last but not least, the TG looked at the issue of a more supportive environment for teaching staff.

The TG first turned to the mission of education, including higher education, as a human right and a public good, which should be provided for all on the highest possible level, based on intellectual capacity and not on the ability to pay¹⁸. HE should enable graduates to be active and critical members of society and actively participate in the development of modern democracies. In a nutshell, the purpose of education is by no means teaching the students what to think but teaching them how to think and how to respond to the ever-changing needs of the labour market.

The TG recognised that the learning process itself is the interaction between qualified teachers and motivated, engaged students in the classrooms – whether they are physically on a campus or virtual. In addition, attractive study and teaching conditions were deemed vital for a positive learning process. In a NESET report¹⁹ from 2013 students from underrepresented backgrounds were highlighted as being at the greatest risk of dropout, especially students from a lower socioeconomic background. While teaching and learning in general and a student centered learning specifically was highlighted as the key for lessening the risk of dropout.

Teaching and learning activities have as such not been a historical focus of the of the EHEA, however this is changing due to the increased focus on these issues such as in the new proposal for the European Standards and Guidelines as well as the new ECTS users guide. With the increased support for the concept of student centered learning in the structural tools it will be important to follow the implementation to ensure that teaching and learning reforms also benefit the Social Dimension.

Members of the TG would urge the BFUG to consider a general recommendation on teaching and learning both from a structural and social dimension perspective be adopted in the Yerevan communiqué that reflects the increased commitment to teaching and learning reforms. To ensure that success of such an aim, members of the TG recommend countries to support improved learning environments and training for teaching staff. Members of the TG also recommend that teaching and learning reforms be monitored more closely in connection with dropout rates to ensure the impact of subsequent reforms. The successful approaches could be highlighted in the PL4SD database.

Student Support and Services

SD&LLL WG representatives of Armenia, Croatia, Germany, and ESU formed the TG on Student Supports and Services. The TG pointed at the crucial role of student support services or social infrastructure – allocation of financial aid, student housing, dining, and counselling services in the social, psychological and career/training fields – for the success of students in higher education.

Given the complexity of social infrastructure, the TG aimed to provide recommendations at different levels, which would be suitable for all systems in the EHEA. For this purpose four topic areas were identified: providing guidance/counselling and networking opportunities for future employment; developing and implementing support structure for underrepresented groups; exploring and creating adequate support mechanisms for mature students; and conducting more focused research on the importance of social infrastructure based on regularly and systematically collected data.

It was acknowledged that a stronger cooperation towards a more inclusive and student-needs-based social infrastructure was indispensable and there was an urgent need to develop a concept of how the social infrastructure could be fostered at the EHEA level.

Lifelong Learning

The TG on lifelong learning and Employability, composed of ESU and EURASHE representatives in the WG, recognised that any decisive progress in lifelong learning should involve a change in paradigm, i.e. lifelong learning should no longer be considered as an aim in itself but be apprehended as an integral part of the social responsibility of higher education institutions: duty to the student body to train/retrain in order to improve its employability; duty to the world of work to provide well trained responsive individuals for employment; duty to society to allow all individuals to be active members of society.

Put it differently, it was highlighted that higher education should exist within the whole continuum of lifelong learning, from basic education to advanced research as the needs of Europe's populations develop over time and targeted actions are required aimed at widening the participation of mature students in higher education. For this purpose, formal and informal barriers to study for mature students should be eliminated through, inter alia, Recognition of Prior Learning and incentives for both students and higher education institutions to engage with one another throughout adult life. *Finally, the TG pointed at the need to develop a guidelines document to assist the EHEA countries in their efforts to integrate lifelong learning in higher education systems, institutions, and society for the upcoming 2015-2018 period.*

From the report of the structural reforms working group:

Recognition of prior learning

Public authorities should

- Review current legislation with a view to removing any remaining obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning;
- Review their national qualifications frameworks with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;
- Encourage higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning.

Higher education institutions should:

- Develop a coordinated approach to the recognition of prior learning, if and where such an approach has not yet been adopted;
- Further commit to the recognition of prior learning by developing institutional policies and guidelines;
- Develop and design flexible curricula that provide and take account of opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and that allow flexible learning paths with flexible modes of entry, progression and delivery;
- Ensure that possibilities for the recognition of prior learning are included in the development and design of curricula, study programs, and flexible learning paths.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should systematically collect data on the practice of RPL by higher education institutions to improve the visibility of these processes and to inform further policy development at national and European levels.

Employers and higher education institutions, with the support of public authorities as appropriate, should develop policies and practice for work based learning that provide sufficient grounds, *inter alia* through the clear definition and attestation of learning outcomes, for the recognition of work based learning not a part of formal education for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and awarding qualifications.

The *ENIC and NARIC Networks and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should develop proposals for coherent policy and practice for the recognition of prior learning throughout the EHEA, taking due account of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012. The *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should consider whether a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by the Committee by 2019.

From the Mobility and internationalization report:

Mobility of underrepresented groups and balance of mobility flows

M&I WG acknowledges that a lot of talent is lost in higher education because many students from underrepresented groups find it difficult to become mobile. A study on the access to mobility of underrepresented student groups and on imbalanced mobility in Europe was analysed by the WG. According to the results of the analysis the WG members recognized the importance to come up with recommendations for underrepresented groups on how to gain more access to mobility and to raise the awareness of this situation in the academic community. Moreover, in terms of imbalanced mobility the WG members shared experiences and learned more on the present situation.

There are three underrepresented groups in mobility identified on the basis of existing and latest European data: students with a low parental educational background, students with delayed transition into higher education (later than 2 years after completing secondary education), and older students.

The WG acknowledges the necessity for providing better data and the main obstacles for underrepresented groups to be addressed. Other categories of underrepresented student groups should also be considered, in addition to the ones identified in the study, namely second-chance students, handicapped students, students with a migrant background, etc.

The responsible authorities should acknowledge that:

- It is desirable that (information on) mobility is already offered in secondary education;
- Visa issues at times hinder mobility for underrepresented groups with migrant background;
- More financial support is needed to increase the mobility of underrepresented groups.

The mobility of underrepresented groups should be considered as an added value. Thus, the WG recommends further research on the main obstacles of mobility of underrepresented groups and to develop a mobility strategy for those groups. Meanwhile, different countries should make up their own policies, depending on which groups of underrepresented students they are primordially dealing with. Further relevant data on the national and European level are necessary to be able to better

identify the student groups underrepresented in mobility as well as the actions and means to satisfy their needs.