

**BOLOGNA WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION AND DATA ON
MOBILITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS
NOTES OF MEETING OF 14-15 DECEMBER 2005, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM**

Present

Annika Persson, Sweden, Ministry of Education, Research and Culture (Chair)
Martin Unger, Austria, Institute of Advanced Studies
Hélène Lagier, France, International Department, Authority of Education
Ann Fritzell, Education International (Swedish Association of University Teachers)
Nina Arnhold, EUA
Brian Power, Ireland, Permanent Representation of Ireland in the EU (first day only)
Myrna Smitt, Sweden, Ministry of Education, Research and Culture
Michael Hörig, ESIB
Germain Dondelinger, Luxemburg (first day only)
Ann McVie, Secretariat (notes)

Apologies

Keith Andrews, UK
Pat Dowling, Ireland

1. Introduction

Annika Persson welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Working Group.

During the introductions, Brian Power explained that he was representing Ireland on behalf of Pat Dowling on this occasion. Nina Arnhold asked if EUA might have more than one representative involved in the work of the group, particularly if the group set up two work strands. Ann Fritzell, representing Education International (EI), was pleased that EI was taking part in a Bologna working group for the first time. Ann McVie advised that she was also the Secretariat representative on the Stocktaking Working Group and hoped to be able to provide a link between the two groups.

Commenting on the fact that neither Bosnia Herzegovina nor the Ukraine were represented, Annika Persson advised that she had tried to contact the respective BFUG members and would continue to do so. It was important for the work of the group that there was broad geographical coverage amongst group members.

Annika Persson referred to the group's task as outlined in the Bergen Communiqué, explaining the purpose of the first meeting was to have an open discussion about that task. Sweden would chair the working group, with Germain Dondelinger from Luxembourg chairing the sub-group working on data collection. The working group and particularly the sub-group, would draw on a range of experts, but they would not be full members of the working group. The group would consider how best to use experts during its first meeting.

The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Terms of reference for the working group

Annika Persson highlighted the section on the social dimension in the Bergen communiqué, explaining that the group's task was to elaborate a definition of the social dimension based on the Bergen and previous communiqués as well as to collect and explore data as a basis for future stocktaking. The mobility strand of the work would focus on data collection, as prescribed in the Bergen Communiqué.

In discussion, the following points were made:

There was a need to take cognisance of the agreement in the Prague Communiqué that higher education should be a public good when defining the social dimension. At the same time, it would be important not to exclude students studying at private higher education institutions from any data collections.

The group's role was not to "rank" the 45 countries against the definition of the social dimension. There would not be any social dimension scorecard for 2007.

There was a need for regular reporting to and feedback from the wider BFUG on the work of the group.

It was agreed that:

There was no need to amend the terms of reference for the working group.

Higher education as a public good should be included as a basis for the social dimension in the final report, but not as part of the definition.

3. Initial discussion about the definition of the social dimension and the data collection, including expected results before the London meeting

Definition of the social dimension

Annika Persson explained that the Swedish Minister had offered in Bergen to take forward work on the definition of the social dimension, which had been referred to in communiqués since Prague. Three Bologna seminars had been held on the social dimension, organised by Greece (February 2003), Norway (June 2003) and France (January 2005). Some, but not all, conclusions from these seminars had been reflected in Ministerial communiqués. Copies of the conclusions were circulated for information.

Drawing on the communiqués, Sweden had prepared an initial definition of the social dimension for consideration by the group. Once the definition had been agreed, the group's task would be to identify actions that could support each aspect of the definition, identify what should be measured and what the priorities for data collection were. Comments were sought on the draft definition.

In discussion, the following points were made:

It would be very difficult to measure some aspects of the suggested definition of the social dimension.

Any definition and data gathering would need to take account of the diversity inherent in the European Higher Education Area.

There may be merit in combining some of the strands of the suggested definition. It may also be beneficial to highlight in the definition the importance of student retention and graduation rates. There could also be a reference to the need for students to have sustainable employment prospects.

It was important in the context of the social dimension for students to have the ability to influence their studying and living conditions, hence the inclusion of the reference to student participation in HE governance.

There was a need to consider the position of PhD students, in view of their status both as students and early stage researchers.

There was a need to clarify whether mobility should be viewed only in the context of the European Higher Education Area, or further afield.

It was important for potential students to receive guidance and counselling. This and other questions related to the educational system at lower levels were however outwith the remit of Ministers responsible for higher education and may therefore be difficult for Bologna Ministers to agree to.

The potential scope of the work was very broad. It would therefore be important to follow closely the priorities outlined in the Bergen Communiqué, and identify, for example, one key element to measure under each aspect of the definition.

It was agreed that:

The comments made would be reflected in the forthcoming elaboration of the concept of the social dimension.

Data collection

Germain Dondelinger outlined his suggested approach to collecting data on the social dimension and on staff and student mobility. There was a need to consider data on staff and students separately. To ensure comparability, it would be necessary to use data from Eurostat, OECD and Eurostudent rather than from individual countries. In the short-term, data from Eurostudent would be of limited use, as they only covered 7 countries. More countries were however expected to take part in future Eurostudent surveys. In addition, Eurydice would be able to provide a descriptive framework of what was in place in each country. Eurydice had agreed to undertake a separate study looking at the social dimension, covering all 45 countries. This would start in February 2006 and be completed before May 2007.

The Eurydice report would be a useful starting point and, together with the available data from Eurostat, OECD and Eurostudent, would allow the group to provide some background, some illustrative data and an indication of the social dimension and the extent of mobility within the European Higher Education Area.

The first priority would be to focus on the social dimension and to deal with mobility at a slightly later stage.

In discussion, the following points were made:

There was a need to accept that there would be gaps in the data presented in May 2007. There would not be any “scorecard” approach at this stage. The groups’ role was to present in May 2007 proposals as a basis for future stocktaking.

It was suggested that the group should encourage BFUG members to take part in the Eurostudent conference taking place in Berlin on 26-27 January 2006 and to consider taking part in future surveys.

UNESCO may be another data source. It may also be possible to gather some basis data on student numbers, gender balance and participation rates from national data sets.

Much of the necessary data can only be gathered from student surveys. There was no time to undertake such surveys between now and May 2007. It will be up to Ministers to decide in London whether they wish to proceed with a comprehensive student survey and, if so, identify who should undertake the survey.

The European Commission was undertaking a survey of the social background of students taking part in the Erasmus programme. This would give some data, but would not be comprehensive. This was also the case for the French study looking at student finance.

The National Reports for the stocktaking exercise could be source of data for the 2007 report of this working group.

The key point was to present the available data in May 2007 and ask Ministers if they wanted to take any aspect of the work further in addition to the future stocktaking.

There would be a need to liaise with the group looking at the portability of loans and grants being taken forward by the Dutch.

There were a considerable number of complex aspects underpinning staff mobility, including pension rights, status as civil servants or employees of the institutions and work permits. The intention was to set up a fact finding group comprising EUA, EI and experts as a first step.

It was questioned whether staff mobility should include or exclude short-term staff exchanges. Data on short-term exchange are available from Erasmus and FP programmes.

It was agreed that:

The Secretariat would draw BFUG's attention to the Eurostudent conference and ask them to take part.

The group would consider its input to the Eurydice survey on the social dimension at its next meeting. Eurydice needs our input by February 2006.

The group would consider whether to include any questions in the National Report.

Staff mobility would include short-term exchanges.

Expected results for London

Annika Persson led an initial discussion on the results expected for the London summit. The outcome of this discussion is represented in diagram format at Annex A.

Actions to support the social dimension

Annika Persson led an initial discussion on the possible actions that might support the definition of the social dimension and guide the data collection.

In discussion, the following possible actions were identified:

- Anti-discrimination legislation/policy for underrepresented groups – aim to ensure HE student cohort reflects society: policy to include gender, ethnicity, social background, disability and age
- Ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- Implement transparency & mobility tools
- Widening access in input, in HE process and output (i.e. ensuring good retention and graduation rates)
- Financial support – portable
- Study environment:
 - Academic
 - ICT and library services
 - housing, canteen services and access to child care?
 - guidance and counselling
- Qualifications Frameworks

- Recognition of prior learning
- Policy on Lifelong Learning
- Outreach programmes
- Flexible delivery models/combination with work, parenthood and caring
- Flexible learning paths into and within higher education
- Supportive resources for parents
- Encourage employers to support learning (tax breaks, sabbaticals, grants)
- Scholarships for guest students
- Legislation & policy on student participation in HE governance
- Visas & work permits
- Linguistic preparation (both mobility point and linked to underrepresented groups)
- Welcome services – single reference point for help with housing etc – both for staff & students
- Geographical access to HE
- Guaranteed housing for beginners

It was agreed that:

The term “access” in this context would refer to the definition of access in the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The list of possible actions would be refined and circulated for comment prior to the next meeting.

Initial discussion of data collection

In the absence of Germain Dondelinger, Annika Persson led a short initial discussion on data collection.

In discussion, the following points were made:

There was a need to define higher education. It was suggested that ISCED 5A, 5B and 6 were used.

There was a need to consider the level at which data should be averaged. It was suggested that data should be averaged at country level (not programme level for example). Explanatory notes would be required, in any cases where the data might be misleading.

There could be options for undertaking some data collection between now and May 2007 through the BFUG representatives.

A useful first step would be to map out what data are available.

There was a need to agree the composition of the sub-group. It could include:

Nina Arnhold, EUA (to be discussed within EUA)

Martin Unger, Austrian expert

ESIB

UK (to be discussed with UK)

France (expert)

Sweden (expert)

It was agreed that:

Higher education would be defined as ISCED 5A, 5B and 6.

The composition of the sub-group would be discussed further at the next meeting. In the meantime, the preliminary composition would be forwarded to Germain Dondelinger.

Martin Unger would produce an overview of available data for 9 March.

4. Organisation of the work: working group (steering committee), subgroups and experts

Annika Persson outlined the suggested approach for the working group. The full working group would define the social dimension and develop recommendations on the scope of a future stocktaking on the social dimension and on mobility. There would be only one sub-group, led by Germain Dondelinger, on data collection. Experts, such as Eurostudent, would take part in the sub-group.

It was agreed that:

The working group would operate on the basis proposed.

5. Schedule

Annika Persson circulated for comments a suggested timetable for the group's work.

It was agreed that:

The next meeting would take place in Stockholm on 19 January. The meeting would focus on:

- *Input to the Eurydice survey, based on a paper produced by Germain Dondelinger.*
- *Input to the template for the National Reports.*

The next again meeting would take place on 9 March, in Brussels, possibly at ESIB's offices.

6. Costs and finances

Annika Persson sought views on how to fund the work of the group.

It was agreed that:

Working group participants would meet their own costs of taking part in the group. ESIB would however receive support from the Chair.

Consideration would be giving to submitting a bid for funding to the European Commons, primarily to cover the cost of publishing the final report and the data collection. (Ann McVie to take forward)

Luxembourg, Sweden and the UK (subject to discussion with Rachel Green) would take the lead in producing the final report.

The issue of support to help the newer countries take part in working groups would be raised at the induction meeting, organised by Austria and the Council of Europe, taking place on 26 January 2006.

7. Communication with the BFUG, other working groups and other relevant actors in the field

Annika Persson underlined the need for the group to establish links with a number of other groups.

In discussion, the following points were made:

There would be continuous communication with BFUG, including a more extensive discussion on the social dimension at the BFUG meeting in April 2006.

There was a need to liaise with the Stocktaking Working Group. As the Secretariat representative on both groups, Ann McVie could assist with liaison between the two groups.

There was a need to liaise with the Dutch group looking at the portability of grants and loans. Pat Dowling may be able to fulfil this role.

It might be beneficial to invite a representative from other working groups to a future meeting of the Social Dimension and Data on Mobility Working Group.

France could act as the liaison point with the Erasmus Working Group.

It was agreed that:

Information would be shared via the section for the Social Dimension and Data on Mobility Working Group behind the curtain on the Bologna website and via email.

8. Next meeting

19 January, in Stockholm, Sweden

9. Any other business

No items were raised

Ann McVie
Bologna Secretariat
21 December 2005