

**BOLOGNA WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION AND DATA ON
MOBILITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS
NOTES OF MEETING OF 9 MARCH 2006, ESIB, BRUSSELS**

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)
Myrna Smitt, Sweden, Ministry of Education, Research and Culture
Michael Hörig, ESIB
Keith Andrews, UK, Department for Education and Skills
Germain Dondelinger, Luxembourg
Melita Kovacevic, Croatia
Nina Arnhold, EUA
Aldrik in t'Hout, Netherlands (item 3 only)
Annelise Sprenger, Netherlands (item 3 only)
Ann McVie, Secretariat (notes)

Apologies

David Crosier, EUA
Pat Dowling, Ireland
Lamija Tanovic, Bosnia Herzegovina

1. Welcome to ESIB and introduction

Annika Persson welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Melita Kovacevic from Croatia who was attending for the first time. She reminded the group of their remit to produce a definition of the social dimension, comparable data on staff & student mobility & make recommendations for future stocktaking.

The minutes of the last meeting and agenda for 9 March were agreed.

Michael Hörig welcomed everyone to ESIB's new HQ. He explained the building was owned by a not for profit organisation, that was keen to promote Brussels as an international student centre. He invited group members to join him on a tour of the building.

2. Report from meetings and discussion

Stocktaking Working Group

Ann McVie reported back on the recent meeting of the Stocktaking Working Group. The group had discussed the proposed indicators in some depth. Eleven indicators would be presented to BFUG for approval in April, together with a template for national reports.

To ensure the process was open and transparent, it was considered important to develop the indicators for the scorecard element of the stocktaking as the first stage in the process. There had been no detailed discussion of the template for national reports. It had, however, been agreed that the template would be elaborated to include a number of specific points under each broad heading, closely following the elements in indicators for the scorecard.

Technical Sub-Group

Germain Dondelinger reported on the first meeting of the technical sub-group. The group had agreed the first challenge was to ensure the data used were reliable & comparable.

This had led to the conclusion that only data from international organisations should be used. Over and above comparable data, it was important to gather information about the context for the data. Sources of data and the surrounding context would be provided by Eurostudent, Eurydice and Eurostat. Eurydice would provide information on the broad regulatory framework for financial support for full-time students studying at publicly funded institutions. Eurostat would provide data on the total amount of funding available and the number of students in the HE system. For 2008, Eurostat would also have some data on mobility and the employability of graduates. Eurostudent would provide complementary data from the student perspective. In addition, Trends V would provide information from an institutional perspective. Each source had different aims and objectives, and there were differences in the geographical coverage of each data set, particularly in the short-term. However, the group had concluded that there was a considerable volume of data available, which would be captured in an analytical grid for consideration at the next meeting. The group had also considered how future stocktaking might be undertaken. There was a view that a benchmarking approach might not be appropriate. Rather, it might be preferable to undertake an analysis of different ways of solving issues concerning the social dimension.

In discussion the following points were made:

- The Eurydice survey would focus on the economic situations of students, not the social dimension as a whole.
- It was regrettable that Eurydice would not be able to include all 45 countries in the survey on the economic situation of students. It might be possible to ask the relevant members of the BFUG to complete the Eurydice survey. This was however a very technical and complex area and it might not be feasible for BFUG members to undertake this task.
- Eurydice was reluctant to gather data on the economic situation of students outwith its network, as it could not guarantee the reliability of that data.
- It would be important for the national reports to gather information on the social dimension, to complement the economic data gathered by Eurydice. The national reports will be the only source for information about all 45 countries.

- The national reports might include questions on widening access; the employability of Bachelor graduates; and student involvement in HE governance structures.
- Initial discussions suggested the group would identify a considerable number of gaps in the data gathered on the social dimension. There appeared, for example, to be no data on participation rates from underrepresented socio economic groups.
- There were doubts that the scorecard approach could be applied to the social dimension. This would however be explored further both in the technical sub group and in the full working group.
- Further data sources might be identified. The Luxemburg Income Study, for example, might be able to provide information, or undertake future studies on the economic structures in all participating countries.

It was agreed that:

- The technical sub group would continue to take forward its work; a further update would be provided at the next meeting of the full working group.

3. Discussion with representatives from the network on portability of grants and loans

Aldrik in t'Hout and Annelise Sprenger joined the meeting to outline the work they were hoping to take forward on portability of grants and loans. It was hoped that BFUG would agree to set up a working group when it next met in April. A number of countries interested in taking forward the portability of grants and loans were undertaking some preparatory work. It was envisaged that the working group would focus on identifying possible solutions to the perceived barriers to portable grants and loans. It was hoped that the group would be able to present a tool box of options to the Ministers when they met in London in 2007.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- While there were difficulties in disassociating social security from other aspects of student support systems, some countries, such as Norway, have already offered portable grants and loans.
- There were already a number of working models on which to base good practice and offer support to other countries looking to introduce portability.
- Portability would support mobility and enhance internationalisation of the student population. It was, however, only one aspect of mobility.
- Some research on portability had been undertaken for the Noordwijk seminar on "Designing policies for mobile students". It was possible the EU might support a further research project to update that data.

- It was hoped that the working group would have a broad membership reflecting the breadth of EHEA.
- There were concerns that portability might lead to the brain drain and loss of income for exporting countries. Against this, however, Ministers had agreed to remove obstacles to student mobility.
- What if there is no support system in the home country to make portable? There is also the problem of different living costs in different countries even if there are portable systems.
- The working assumption was that portability would be based on the home country providing the student support. This was a particular issue for EU countries, where students had specific rights within the EU.
- Using the 'home country' principle might be prejudicial to students studying in a country which provided a more generous support package. One option might be to allow the student to elect which support system to join.
- Scholarships would not be affected by any portability arrangements
- The discussion had identified that there were a considerable number of issues to explore. This suggested that the Social Dimension Working Group might support the proposal for a portability working group to be set up.
- While any portability working group would have a different role and focus from the Social Dimension Working Group, there are areas of common interest and it might be beneficial to exchange information and data. This included the data to be gathered on portable grants and loans by the Eurydice survey.
- There would not be any stocktaking on portability or the social dimension in 2007. There might be proposals for stocktaking on portability for 2009.
- It would be useful for any portability working group to include a representative from the EC.

It was agreed that:

- The Social Dimension Working Group would keep in touch with developments on the portability of grants and loans.
- Germain Dondelinger would liaise with Aldrik in t'Hout about the data on portable grants and loans arising from the Eurydice survey.

4. Continued development of the concept of the social dimension

Annika Persson advised that she hoped the paper published on the definition would form the basis of the group's report to the April BFUG. Before inviting discussion of the paper and views on how best the present evolving definition of the social dimension to the BFUG, she explained the background to some of the changes made to the draft definition since the previous meeting.

In discussion the following points were made:

- It would be important to report progress on all aspects of the groups remit, as well as seeking comments on the proposed definition of the social dimension.
- It would also be important to be clear what the group was asking BFUG to do at the April meeting.
- There might be merit in presenting the suggested objectives and strategies to BFUG only at this stage. Examples of possible measures and actions might only be reported orally. In any event, any list of measures should make clear that it was neither exclusive nor final.
- In view of sensitivities surrounding wording refining to access, it might be helpful to refer to the Council of Europe Recommendation on Access to Higher Education.
- Papers for BFUG were due to be circulated by 23 March.
- A number of suggested priorities were identified within the current list of objectives, strategies and measures. There was broad agreement to the proposed priorities.

It was agreed that:

- Annika Persson would revise the paper to reflect the discussion and circulate it for further comments, before it was submitted as a paper to BFUG.
- Annika Persson would discuss further with Germain Dondelinger how to report the full working and technical sub-groups' progress to BFUG.

5. Template for national reports

Ann McVie explained the stage of development of the national report template. The sections of particular interest to the Social Dimension Working Group concerned lifelong learning, the social dimension and mobility. She explained the intention to clarify some supplementary questions for those areas and invited suggestions from the working group.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- It would be helpful to invite countries to report progress since the last period, rather than only the current state of development.
- There was broad agreement that questions relating to the social dimension should be broad and strategic, rather than precise at this stage. Questions might be closely related to the text in the Bergen Communiqué on the social dimension.
- Key aspects to consider included; widening access; retention measures; monitoring arrangements.
- Questions might be based on: whether a country has any policy on widening access; if so, describe it; explain how it is evaluated and any plans for future development.
- More specific questions might include whether data is gathered on underrepresented groups.
- Questions could also be based on what obstacles had been identified and what action was being taken to resolve the issues identified.

It was also agreed that:

- Ann McVie would consider the points raised and circulate a revised draft for comment in week commencing 13 March.

6. Future meetings

The next meeting would take place on 14 June, in Vienna.

7. Any other business

No items were raised

Ann McVie
Bologna Secretariat
4 April 2006