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REPORT OF THE ADVISORY GROUP 1 ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

Introduction

The Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension (AG SD) is co-chaired by Ninoslav S. Schmidt (Croatia) and Robert Napier (the European Students' Union – ESU). 17 other members and stakeholders are part of this advisory group, and these are: Austria, Belgium Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, EI/ETUCE, EUA, European Commission, EUROSTUDENT, Germany, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom and United Kingdom (Scotland).

Advisory group meetings

The Advisory Group met for the first time in Zagreb on the 19th of February 2019 at the Ministry of Science and Education. 13 representatives were present for the meeting together with the co-chairs and the members of the BFUG Secretariat. At the time of the meeting, Luxembourg participated in an advisory role, and a few countries could not attend due to various reasons. The UK also participated for part of the meeting via Skype.

The first meeting saw a discussion on the terms of reference and what is intended to be achieved by the end of this working period. The Group was also informed about Luxembourg and Sweden asking to join, and the procedure for the online consultation was explained. A roundtable discussion followed on the current state of play of the social dimension, with emphasis being put on the commitments made on the social dimension within the BFUG, and an analysis of how many of these were actually implemented. A discussion included an overview of some national experiences in implementing social dimension principles, as well as obstacles which some countries faced in the process of implementation of social dimension principles.

The most productive part of the meeting were the workshops. During the workshops **the vision for the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension (PAG)** that the group should deliver by the next Ministerial Conference was discussed. Following this, **a SWOT analysis was carried out**, to make sure that a realistic picture is being taken for the way forward. Members of the AG1 agreed that the PAGs should be short and concise in order to secure its effective implementation by the EHEA members in the period after 2020.

As part of the work of the workshops, **a clear AG1's Workplan 2019-2020 with timeline and goals** for the upcoming meetings was also set out. The request of the BFUG Board to deliver a first draft for feedback as soon as possible and in a timely manner was also taken into consideration. It was also agreed that the work of the AG would take into consideration reports done by previous BFUG advisory groups for social dimension, in order to ensure not to duplicate work and to work constructively taking into consideration things that have and have not worked in the past. The detailed timeline for the upcoming meetings is clearly laid out in the minutes of this first meeting. The restricted area for members has also been set up, and the co-chairs have made sure to update it accordingly with useful literature, policy briefs and drafts of the PAG.

At the **second meeting** held in Brussels in March further strides were made towards achieving an ideal structure for the Principles and Guidelines. The **AG decided to work on two sets of concise principles** to start with: one set of **Principles and Guidelines for HE System Level** policy making and **one set for HE Institutions**. The discussions from both workshops served as a basis for the work of the drafting team. Certain priorities were highlighted, such as the need to have the commitment to the social dimension evident through explicit mention in national strategic goals for higher education, to data collection, to the need of accurate and reliable information. We were working in two parallel groups. Both groups reported in a plenary format. At this meeting we have initiated a discussion on whether and how two sets of PAGs (for HR Systems and for HE institutions) can be developed, and what the link of enforcement between them would be.

The group decided to formulate a drafting team consisting of seven members. The co-chairs had to act as moderators, as well as provide a first draft based on the discussions that took place during this meeting. A discussion also took place regarding possible topics for the PLAs for this group. It was decided that amongst others, we should learn more from

countries which have set a plan for social dimension or have defined social dimension goals within their HE strategy. The definition of social dimension was also subject of our discussions, as well as links between social dimension and enhancement of quality in HE. Following this meeting the co-chairs worked with the Drafting team and proposed the first draft of the PAGs, which were to serve as the basis of all discussions in the group's **third meeting in Vienna**.

During the third meeting, **two keynote presentations** were also given to widen the scope of the group's discussion. The first was given by a representative of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research, which focused on the Austrian experience in creating social dimension policy. The presentation explained the steps for development of the Austrian National strategy for social dimension in HE, including the identification of national targets as well as underrepresented groups and groups with specific needs. Following this, the representative of EUA presented the preliminary outcomes of the INVITED Survey, which is part of a project aimed at supporting institutions in fulfilling their social responsibility to reflect societal diversity, promote good practices, peer learning and exchange between institutions and policy makers. Following this, a panel discussion with Q&A took place, which was basis for developing the content of the draft of the PAGs.

When discussing the **outcomes of the Brussels meeting**, the group agreed that the PAGs should be based on a list of key principles, high level statements based on a proposition or value, serving as a basis for the conceptualisation of policies. Following this, the group started thoroughly discussing the draft principles, where the proposal to foresee an introductory part was accepted, and it was also agreed that the **definition of SD will combine the definitions used in the Bergen 2005, London 2007 and the Yerevan 2015 Communique**. It was also agreed that the introductory part must be short and stress the contribution of SD to equity, quality, excellence, and economic development. The discussion outlined also the symbolic relevance and sensitiveness of words, recommending the use of positive rather than negative approach and terms, when possible. The use of the term "groups" vs. "students" or "learners" was discussed. The **following inputs for the Drafting committee were agreed:**

- reference to "underrepresented", "vulnerable" and "disadvantaged" groups and/or students/learners will be made, with a clear definition of the categories;

therefore, all the three terms will be used in the text, depending on the context. The definition of these categories will be made at the beginning of the text.

- the terms “groups”, “students” or “learners” will be used depending on the context;
- the notion of intersectionality should be considered;
- although relevant, practical examples should shift to a different part of the document.
- Reference to the principle of autonomy of higher education institutions should be already included in the introduction

The rest of the meeting was spent analyzing each draft principal individually, and reaching a consensus on the wording and way forward. Towards the end of the meeting, a **discussion arose about the way forward, and whether the group should actually put forward two sets of PAGs or one.** The discussion was based on the fact that a list of principles targeted to HEIs could not be released without consulting those institutions. The Co-chairs suggested to discuss the proposal to add a new principle to the list, establishing an obligation for the ministries to consult HEIs and relevant stakeholders in their systems about the implementation of the principles, in order to bring their feedback for the BFUG within the next Bologna cycle, i.e. three years. At this stage and according to this proposal, AG1 would have to give to the Rome 2020 Ministerial Conference: a) one set of PAGs for the ministerial level with a final principle introducing the national consultation; b) an annex, i.e. the list of PAGs for HEIs. National consultations would be carried out on the basis of the latter list, in order to allow actors being affected by the adoption of the PAGs for HEIs to be consulted and give feedback during the first cycle of implementation of PAGs.

Strong and weak points of the proposal were widely discussed, and participants finally agreed to go on working on the existing sets of principles. An introduction (or preamble) will be provided to explain the rationale of two separate lists and to stress the importance of tackling the national level, recommending that ministries hold a consultation process with their HEIs and national stakeholders, to create ownership and legitimate the adoption of principles, that should be implemented according also to national needs.

At the end of this meeting, it was agreed that the AG1 Drafting Committee will work to revise and rephrase the two sets of principles for HE systems and for HE institutions.

After the Vienna meeting **the co-chairs have worked on collecting input from the members of the drafting team and the members of the AG1 at large. There were three rounds of consultations and the drafting team, along with other AG1 members, came to conclusion that the PAG should contain only one set of principles and guidelines for social dimension intended for HE systems. Therefore, all the previous contributions of the AG1 members were merged into 10 principles for HE systems in the EHEA countries.** The current working version of the PAGs is also annexed to this report for your consideration. The idea behind the ten principles symbolizes the upcoming decade of the Bologna Process for the period 2020-2030. The principles and guidelines are forward-looking, because they connect social dimension with other inclusive policies in higher education. In this way, social dimension goes beyond inclusion of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in higher education creating a framework for fostering inclusion, equity and diversity in HE. The principles and guidelines should help the EHEA countries to create effective policies for enhancing social dimension in HE, through which HE systems and HE institutions will be capable to demonstrate how they deliver public benefits.

As co-chairs, we recognize that further work is needed on the introductory part of the document, in order to have a more holistic approach introducing the PAGs. This will be done at the 4th AG1 Meeting. Furthermore, the 4th meeting will also feature discussions on the monitoring of the Social Dimension,. The co-chairs of the group will update the BFUG on matters discussed at the 4th meeting of the group during the oral reporting at the BFUG. The 4th and 5th AG1 meetings (**11 November 2019, Helsinki**; 11 February 2020, venue to be confirmed) will be targeted at finalising the whole document(s).

Lastly, a Peer Learning Activity is being planned for February/March 2020, which will be open to ministry representatives beyond those in the Advisory group. This PLA will center around the different definitions given to the term 'social dimension' as well as good practices of implementation, and more concretely, the interaction between states and HEIs in achieving set goals for the social dimension. Particular attention will be put on discussing monitoring of the implementation of the social dimension principles.