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Written update on Advisory Group 2 “Learning and Teaching”

Co-chairs: Eurashe, France and Netherlands
Date: 10 June 2020

Scope of the work

The increased focus on learning and teaching, capacity of institutions to open up to new skill demands and educational pathways and an urgent need for concepts and effective programs to train teachers as well as clear frameworks for teachers future teaching skills is challenging the current European higher education Area. While higher education systems in member states are often under pressure due to changing demographics, societal challenges, technological advancements and possibilities of digital learning and teaching are calling for change.

It is the mission of the advisory group for learning and teaching to develop concise principles for innovative and inclusive approaches in learning and teaching, with actions and best-practice examples of how governments can support institutions to develop, enhance and implement strategies for teaching and learning within higher education institutions while respecting academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Apart from the digital agenda which is one important focus point of the Paris Communique, also the issue to equip teachers with skills and competences for future teaching, as well as helping learners to become autonomous learners, and inclusive and lifelong learning are included in the scope of this AG.

Update on the work

Since the last BFUG meeting, in Kyiv early March and the Bologna Board meeting on April 2, the Advisory Group on L&T has met (digitally) one more time. This meeting was held on the 25th of May 2020.

AG2 has been working on two separate documents: one long version, which contains a full summary of the work done by the advisory group and a shortened version, which will be annexed to the Rome communiqué. In addition, inspiring learning and teaching practices have been collected.

Feedback at the board meeting (2-4-2020)

At the latest Bologna board meeting (online) on April 2, the progress of the work in AG2 was discussed. The countries and organizations present commented that the annex had improved since the last meeting and it was generally considered to be a valuable annex to the communiqué. Some concerns were voiced regarding the collection of inspiring practices. The geographical scope of the countries that had submitted inspiring practices was limited. This is why a request was made to postpone the deadline for submission of inspiring practices. Also, the clear link between the inspiring practices and the recommendations that AG2 proposes was still missing.

The new context of the global Covid-19 crisis was also discussed during this board meeting, and it was generally considered that the crisis has a massive impact on higher education in EHEA and especially on learning and teaching practices. The crisis highlights the importance of innovation in learning and teaching and in cooperating internationally on these themes.

It was mentioned that it would be good if the Bologna process would start collecting the experiences of HEI's in various countries during the Covid-19 crisis. AG2 was asked to manage the collection of these experiences.

Collection of practices

After the board meeting an e-mail was sent to all BFUG members, informing them that the deadline for submission of inspiring practices was postponed to June 10. Additionally, BFUG representatives were asked to collect experiences from HEI's dealing with the current health crisis. The deadline for these submissions was also June 10.

We have so far received a few additional inspiring practices on learning and teaching. However, the total amount of countries that made a submission is quite low: 12. As for the geographical scope; that has improved thanks to some additional submissions. The good news is that all the areas that we had defined (linked to the various themes on which we have made recommendations) are covered. The practices are heterogeneous in their format. The AG2 co-chairs have yet to work on synchronizing these practices with the recommendations and principles in the text. This could not yet have been done at the time of writing this update, as the deadline for submitting practices was June 10.

We have only received very minimal input on the questions about experiences of higher education institutions in the current Covid19 crisis. We discussed this matter in the AG2 meeting and it was generally agreed that now is not the time for the collection of these experiences, as institutions are still busy finding ways to deal with the situation. Practices are being collected in various fora (for instance through the Enic-Naric network, that collects the various ways countries deal with recognition of qualifications in the time of Covid19). It was generally felt an additional effort to collect experiences or practices would not be necessary. It is more effective to have discussions on the matter, starting with the discussions during the next BFUG meeting, but also perhaps during the ministerial meeting in November.

AG2 meeting 25-5-2020

At the last online meeting of AG2 the feedback from the board meeting was discussed. It was agreed that it is too soon to change the recommendations in light of the current Covid-19 crisis. It was emphasized that the crisis illustrates the importance of the work done by AG2. However, at the same time, members stated that the effect of the crisis is not only on learning and teaching but on all aspects of the Bologna cooperation (for instance also on the social dimension). It should therefore be discussed in this broad sense. AG2 does not propose drastic changes to its texts. A short paragraph on Covid-19 was added in the preamble and some points were emphasized given their prominence in light of the current situation.

During this meeting, a broader discussion on the work of AG2 also took place, because it was felt by the members of AG2 that while the group managed to come up with recommendations, these are still quite general and not always very concrete. If we manage to get a clearer vision of where we want to be when it comes to learning and teaching in the future, we might also get a clearer picture of what concrete measures are needed to get there. To help ourselves in envisioning this 'bigger picture' for the future, it was agreed that a small group within AG2 will start work on drawing up a new terms of reference document, to guide the work in the next working period (2020-2023). This way AG2 will not only deliver a set of general guidelines as a starting point, but also a proposal for how to take the work further.

Next steps

- a subgroup within AG2 will work on a draft ToR document, which can be presented at the next BFUG meeting in September. This group will meet shortly for a first meeting.
- a final version of the texts (long version and annex) will be finalized and will be ready for final approval at the next BFUG meeting.
- this will include a set of inspiring practices which is linked to the work done by the advisory group and to the recommendations that are made.