



## WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION

Fourth Meeting, Online,  
17 February 2021  
09.30 -16.00 hours (CET)

### Minutes

#### List of Participants

| Country  | Name              | Last Name   |
|--|-------------------|-------------|
| Albania  | Jonada            | Shaholli    |
| Austria  | Sara              | Velic       |
| Belgium Flemish Community                          | Patrick           | Willems     |
| Belgium French Community                           | Caroline          | Hollela     |
| Council of Europe                                  | Sjur              | Bergan      |
| Croatia (Co-Chair)                                 | Ninoslav Šćukanec | Schmidt     |
| Croatia  | Nino              | Zganec      |
| Cyprus   | Alexandra         | Petridou    |
| Denmark  | Jacob             | Blasius     |
| EI - ETUCE   | Annette           | Dolan       |
| Estonia  | Janne             | Pukk        |
| ESU - European Students' Union                     | Martina           | Darmanin    |
| EUA - European University Association              | Henriette         | Stoeber     |
| EURASHE  | John              | Edwards     |
| European Commission                                | Lucie             | Trojanova   |
| European Commission                                | Kinga             | Szuly       |
| EUROSTUDENT  | Martin            | Unger       |
| France   | Stéphane          | Lauwick     |
| Georgia  | Tornike           | Bakakuri    |
| Germany  | Iris              | Kimizoglu   |
| Italy  | Maria Antonietta  | Ciclista    |
| Latvia   | Alina             | Loseva      |
| Malta  | Madonna           | Maroun      |
| The Netherlands                                    | Berto             | Bosscha     |
| Poland   | Monika            | Przybysz    |
| Romania  | Mihai Cezar       | Hâj         |
| Romania  | Horia             | Oniță       |
| Slovenia   | Maja              | Svent       |
| Slovenia   | Mateja            | Berčan      |
| Turkey   | Lütfiye           | Durak Ata   |
| United Kingdom                                     | Graeme            | Atherton    |
| United Kingdom                                     | Angharad          | Penny Evans |
| Institute for the Development of Education (Guest) | Thomas            | Farnell     |

Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Slovak Republic were absent. United Kingdom(Scotland) sends in its regrets.

## **1. Welcome remarks and approval of the Agenda**

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the fourth meeting of the 2021-2024 work period. The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes and the minutes of the third WG on SD meeting were approved without additional remarks.

For more detailed information, please see: [WG SD FR AZ 4 Agenda](#)

For more detailed information, please see: [WG SD SI AM 3 Minutes](#)

## **2. Summary of the main conclusions from the last meeting (16 November 2021)**

Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Co-Chair) gave an overview of the WG on SD's progress thus far, emphasizing the relevance of the revised definition of SD, the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs), and the necessity to establish a monitoring framework for the implementation of the PAGs. The Work Plan 2021-2024, published in January 2022, was presented containing the purpose, objectives and methods of work together with the timeline, resources and communication channels.

It was highlighted that the WG will organize five meetings per year, with the fifth meeting to be held on 26 April 2022, in person in Malta. Cooperation with other BFUG WGs, such as the WG on Monitoring and, more recently, the WG on Learning and Teaching, has also been created. A summary of the Erasmus+ project application, submitted successfully on the October call in 2021, as well as the peer-learning activities (PLAs) completed thus far, was provided, allowing for a broad overview of the various initiatives, tools, and indicators that have been developed throughout Europe.

Mr. Schmidt concluded by thanking Malta for offering to host the fifth meeting in person, highlighting that the transition to in-person meetings is underway, with invitations to organize future meetings in the UK and the Netherlands in 2022.

For more information, please see: [Overview of progress in 2021-2022](#).

## **3. SD Principle and Guideline No.9 related to strengthening of community engagement in higher education: PLA 1 – Council of Europe**

Sjur Bergan (CoE) presented the CoE's background on the local democratic mission of higher education, with emphasis on higher education institutions (HEIs) that work with and for their local communities. An overview of the platform's background and focus area was provided, emphasizing that it began as a collaboration between CoE, a group of US higher education NGOs and the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy and has since shifted its focus to a series of larger scale conferences called the Global Fora. The platform is addressing universal issues in a local context, with the CoE focused on developing the reference framework of competencies for democratic culture. Furthermore, Mr. Bergan stated that the platform for the local democratic mission (FOCI) is now being developed and would be accessible in the fall. Further information on the scope and target groups was provided, outlining that the platform is unequivocal about its commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, viewing the local mission as part of the CoE's overall work on the broader democratic mission of higher education (HE).

The connection between the social dimension and local democratic mission of HE was discussed. It was suggested that the work of HEIs with local actors would be very beneficial in improving access and motivating people to pursue HE (e.g., Queens University in Belfast, Dublin City University), in order to help the local communities, develop both economically and in terms of social integration and social development.

It was noted that the European discourse has been over the past 20 years has focused on the importance of higher education in economic development. As a result, the CoE defined four fundamental objectives of higher education: labor market preparation, citizen preparedness in

democratic societies, personal development and advanced knowledge development. Since 2007, the Bologna Process and many HEI leaders and public authorities have worked to integrate these objectives into European HEIs and communities, resulting in a better understanding of what higher education should be about.

It was suggested that the creation of social dimension indicators of higher education should be focused on national policies that are monitored on a national level. The role of democratization of educational governance structures was also proposed, in helping to achieve social equity of HE. Involving student representatives in the policy-making process, for example, could result in more policies that encourage access to equity, inclusion and diversity. There has been a transition in governing structures within Europe from the traditional model, in which the academic institution is ruled solely by academic community, to a model in which external social actors play a large minority, if not a majority, role. In a model with substantial external representation, competences in societal relations and the role that HE should play in broader society are required in addition to competency on the direct missions of HE. As a result, it was proposed that local actors be included in the administration and advising of HEIs.

In addition to national policies, it was advised that public authorities, local associations, NGOs and civil society be involved in contributing to and developing the higher education system. Finally, it was suggested that the local democratic mission or community participation be given greater prominence in the approaching working period, either through the Communique or by defining its role in the advancement of higher education more explicitly. It was stated that a declaration from ministers on what they regard to be the ideal local democratic mission of higher education is critical because it gives public authorities and the higher education community a political platform to work on this further.

For more information, please see: [The Local Democratic Mission of Higher Education](#).

#### **4. SD Principle and Guideline No.9 related to strengthening of community engagement in HE: PLA 2 – Institute for the Development of Education (IDE)**

Thomas Farnell (IDE) introduced two projects developed by IDE in the last four years, which jointly make up the European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education. Specifically, the initial and original project TEFCE<sup>1</sup>, implemented in 2018, and its more recent, follow-up project SHEFCE<sup>2</sup>. The aim of both has been to promote and encourage HEIs to participate in community engagement on a local and global scale.

Mr. Farnell focused on the SHEFCE project, the aim of which is to establish a European online portal and network to promote the application of an “Institutional Self-Reflection Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education.” The advisory board of this project includes a number of institutions such as EUA, EURASHE, Council of Europe and OECD. This project works to pilot and further develop the “TEFCE Toolbox” - an innovative, recently-developed framework and qualitative set of tools for community engagement.

Due to the fact that community engagement is generally context-specific, a one-size-fits-all approach may fail in successfully achieving or supporting it. For this reason, there are no metrics, rankings, comparisons or quantitative measurements involved in the TEFCE toolbox, rendering it entirely qualitative in nature. It is multifaceted and context-specific, entirely adaptable to the use of universities of different kinds, existing in disparate contexts.

The TEFCE toolbox has been piloted in four different kinds of universities and locations, including traditional and technological universities in both capital cities and less developed regions, with the aim of raising visibility of the value that universities bring to communities and vice-versa, peer-learning support between institutions and providing a basis for action planning.

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<sup>1</sup> TEFCE: Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education

<sup>2</sup> SHEFCE: Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement

It was noted that because the role of HE in responding to societal challenges is reemerging as a priority as well as in EU Policy, it is important to support all relevant stakeholders in building understanding of this broader societal mission of HE. Furthermore, a focus on the enhancement of community engagement reflected the agenda of the Council of Europe, which cites “the democratic mission of higher education,” as one of its top priorities for the next decade. Additionally, the European Universities Initiative has placed considerable emphasis on the ways in which universities should be impacting regions and localities, not only economically but via more substantial engagement with communities, by making “civic engagement” one of its top priorities. If societal impact is the broader objective, then community engagement can serve as an effective pathway toward achieving this end, by increasing the productivity of interactions between researchers and society, students and their community, and local universities with global communities.

The role of public authorities was discussed, including how they can enable HEIs to develop community engagement, whether types of support (financial or non-financial means), research or external quality assurance services are provided, and what level of involvement is sufficient. It was agreed that the inclusion of community engagement by HEIs in strategic documents and policies at a national level would be the ideal first step that would allow HEIs to define systems and needs (financial and non-financial) for the implementation of community engagement.

The process of creating indicators was discussed, with focus on what should be taken specifically into consideration for something as context-specific as the social dimension. Some relevant questions that were suggested included: to what extent is this idea of HE community engagement mentioned in system and national level policy, which indicators are already present in policy documents, and what is already being done in terms of financial or non-financial support or supporting programs.

In terms of future plans regarding SHEFCE, a web platform will be developed that contains a range of resources including a list of universities that have been using the toolbox and their results. Relevant case studies for universities in Ireland, Croatia, Spain, Belgium (Flanders) and Austria will illustrate drivers and barriers to engagement at the system level. It was also clarified that the SHEFCE project does not require more community engagement from the university, but rather recognizes, validates and works to build upon activities that have already been happening, thereby creating an environment in which the value of community engagement is uncovered and further developed by the members of the community itself, as an entire support network becomes more visible and available to others.

As no systematic approach has yet been reached between universities and QA agencies, it was suggested that the self-reflective toolbox may serve as a reference framework to help QA agencies with their work in this area. It was emphasized that the TEFCE toolbox's self-reflective approach has the potential to yield positive results in terms of authentic, grassroots level community engagement. From a policy perspective, it is imperative that the learning process occurs at the institutional level rather than as a result of top-down policy compliance. Rather than defining strict national guidelines and indicators for community engagement, it was advised that universities be given the recognition, flexibility and necessary support to involve all relevant stakeholders in the process as well as share best practices with one another.

For more information, please see: [Community Engagement in Higher Education](#).

## **5. European Strategy for Universities**

Kinga Szuly (European Commission) presented a comprehensive overview of the higher education package of the Commission, introducing the two main elements: 1. European Strategy for Universities; 2. Draft Council recommendation on more effective European higher education cooperation, including the social dimension aspects of the package. The aim of the European Strategy for Universities is to support all types and missions of HE, identify tangible actions in the priority areas and highlight the necessary financial reforms to implement the strategy. Moreover, the priority initiatives linked to the European way of life were presented: diversity, inclusion and gender quality; protection and promotion of democratic values. Finally, the supporting actions of the strategy were outlined, including mobilizing

adequate financial support and monitoring progress of the European higher education sector, as well as promoting synergies among the EHEA-ERA-EEA.

It was noted that the European Framework for diversity and inclusion would complement and support the further implementation of the SD principles and guidelines, as the strategy itself has been inspired largely by the work of the Bologna Process. Further, a roadmap with the format and main outlines would be presented to the group as soon as it was completed, so that the WG on SD may build on it as well. The Higher Education Sector Observatory, which will focus on the development of social dimension indicators in collaboration with stakeholders, was discussed as one of the strategy's supporting actions. There is ongoing work on identifying new indicators through the European Tertiary Education Registry and the EUROSTUDENT survey, as well as on how to create synergies between these databases.

Addressing member states concerns on data protection is necessary to effectively measure the social dimension of higher education. EUROSTUDENT was cited as an informative and resourceful tool, for example, in assessing the SD. Through the Erasmus + program the European Commission is supporting many activities related to community engagement of universities, and some ideas have been discussed for future ways that the Erasmus + program can encourage institutions to create social innovation spaces in universities to support equity, inclusion and community engagement of HE, as well as to develop stronger links with secondary schools.

Finally, the importance of monitoring the strategy's execution under the EEA was emphasized, with the Commission indicating that a scoreboard based on data from the Observatory and collaboration with their Higher Education Working Group will be used to track the strategy's implementation.

For more information, please see: [European strategy for universities](#).

For more information, please see: [Council Recommendation on European HE cooperation](#).

For more information, please see: [Related staff working document](#).

## **6. Social dimension Principle and Guideline No.9 related to strengthening of community engagement in higher education: PLA 3 - EURASHE**

John Edwards (EURASHE) gave an overview of EURASHE, including its membership and strategic framework for 2019-2022. The 31<sup>st</sup> annual conference on 'Next Generation PHE', to be held in Brussels in 23-24 May 2022 was highlighted with focus on inclusion, digitalization and innovation.

Mr. Edwards presented the Erasmus+ project "UASiMAP: Mapping Regional Engagement Activities of European Universities of Applied Sciences", that maps and further supports the regional engagement activities of European professional HEIs. The project consists of four dimensions, one of which "Enhancing social, civic, and community involvement in the region," focuses on community-engaged teaching and learning, building of systematic approaches to social, civic and community engagement. In terms of the methodology, the project has two components: a self-reflection tool and a self-assessment report to assess universities' regional impact.

HE Innovate was highlighted as one of the fundamental instruments that serves as basis for the self-reflection tool of UASiMAP regarding the self-assessment of Universities of Applied Sciences. Following the regional impact reflection, the project's next stage includes the creation of a self-assessment report, containing both quantitative and qualitative indicators, as well as the development of an in-depth methodology. The selection of indicators for UASiMAP was discussed, with the objective of applying a SMART<sup>3</sup> approach for institutions and countries. The quantitative and qualitative indicators ("narratives") were presented, with the latter being crafted on the inputs, outputs and outcomes in terms of regional impact. The tools being developed within the USiMAP project, although intended primarily for professional HEIs, will be measured through self-assessment tools and reports to be equally used for research-oriented universities as well.

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<sup>3</sup> Specific; Measurable; Acceptable; Relevant; Timely.

Finally, a remark was made on the complex task to create quantitative indicators that can be applicable to all institutions. It was also proposed that the socioeconomic context and the actual impact be separated when choosing indicators.

## **7. Discussion on the subgroups**

Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Co-Chair) presented a proposal for the formation of three subgroups, in accordance with the discussions of the third WG Meeting (16 November 2021). An outline of the structure, timeline and guidelines of the subgroups was provided, with the aim of developing indicators for the implementation and monitoring of the P&G for SD. As the P&G were mainly developed for public authorities, indicators should primarily target the public authorities. Each subgroup will focus on three principles and be tasked with developing indicators for these principles under the guidance of one coordinator (WG Co-Chairs and Berto Bosscha).

The first phase (February to September 2022) would primarily focus on indicator development and relate to the specific principle, not only its guidelines. When the first phase is completed, a monitoring mechanism for each principle should be developed in the second phase (September - December 2022). The subgroups would work between WG meetings and report on their progress at WG meetings. Each subgroup should deliver their output to the WG Co-Chairs before the fifth meeting, to be shared with the members prior and discussed at the WG meeting. It was proposed that for the fifth WG meeting, three workshops be held for the presentation of the work of each subgroup, with members providing feedback to each, followed by the development of a concrete plan for continuing their work until the next WG meeting in June.

In terms of the working methodology, a Google Drive folder would be created and shared with all members, holding all of the necessary documents and materials for the subgroups' work. Mr. Schmidt suggested using the *Eurydice's questionnaire on fostering equity and inclusion in the Higher Education Area* as a guide for developing the indicators, as well advised that the subgroups combine both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Furthermore, the WGs on SD and on Monitoring would coordinate their efforts and, in accordance with the ToRs, consider how public authorities will monitor the execution of the indicators created.

Furthermore, it was specified that each subgroup would be directed by the designated coordinator and would have some autonomy in terms of the work organization, methodology and expected outcomes. The subgroup meeting dates and deadlines would be communicated to the group members prior to the upcoming WG meeting in Malta. It was also decided that the deadline for delivering the subgroups' work would be April 20th, right before the WG's fifth meeting.

## **8. Planning of the future meetings**

The next meeting of the WG would be held in presence, in Malta. The Co-Chairs thanked the Malta representative for hosting the next meeting and proceeded to discuss the arrangements of the physical meeting. Madonna Maroun (Malta) confirmed that a document with all pertinent material is being prepared and will be distributed to WG members prior to the meeting. Mr. Schmidt also noted that he will be sending out an invitation package for the next meeting, as well as the necessary information on the Covid-19 restrictions, to the members. It was noted that all the members of the Working Group on Social Dimension are expected to organize and cover the costs of their travels to Malta themselves while the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) would cover the costs for the accommodation and meals during the meeting (including a dinner on the evening prior to the meeting).

## **9. AOB**

The Co-Chairs notified that they will be defining the meeting venue for the sixth WG meeting, after the meeting in Malta. The EUA representative also sent an email indicating that the sixth meeting could be held in Brussels. Martina Darmanin (Co-Chair) added that a student focus group is being organized, where

there will be discussions on the perspectives on equity and practices in higher education. On this point, all national unions will be invited to participate.

### **10. Concluding remarks**

The Co-Chairs thanked the guests and members for their contributions and feedback, as well as on how to structure the work on the indicators and monitoring system. All the meeting materials will be made available on the EHEA website. No other business was brought forward, thus the fourth meeting of the WG on SD was successfully concluded.