BFUG9 6D

WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION AND
DATA ON MOBILITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

Progress Report for the BFUG 12-13 October

The terms of reference for the Working Group (WG) on Social Dimension and Data on the Mobility of Staff and Students in Participating Countries were agreed by the BFUG in November 2005. The terms of reference are summarized as follows:

- to define the concept of social dimension based on the ministerial communiqués of the Bologna Process
- to present comparable data on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries
- to present comparable data on the mobility of staff and students
- to prepare proposals as a basis for future stocktaking

This document is intended to provide a basis for a discussion about envisaged outcomes of the work of the WG within the two areas concerned: social dimension and mobility of staff and students.

1. Social Dimension

1.1 Rationale

The social dimension is an essential element of the Bologna Process if we are to fully achieve the objective of enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The social dimension of the Process aims at strengthening social cohesion, reducing inequalities and maximizing the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to society and the economy.

The rationale behind the social dimension of higher education is at least three-fold. Firstly, it is a question of equal opportunity. All individuals should have equal opportunities to take advantage of higher education leading to personal development, preparation for sustainable

employment and life as an active citizen. A strong social dimension is a necessary prerequisite for all students to successfully enter, carry out and complete their studies.

Secondly, taking steps to meet the increasing demand for quality higher education creates prospects for reinforced social, cultural and economic development of our societies. Opening up opportunities to higher education to everyone means using all potential within societies and ensuring the development and maintenance of an advanced knowledgebase. Higher education also plays a key role in developing and maintaining a democratic culture. Widening opportunities for everybody to participate in higher education will contribute to the strengthening of pluralistic democracy and tolerance.

Thirdly, a strong social dimension enhances the quality of higher education and the attractiveness of European higher education. Different perspectives meet, challenge and develop the academic culture and approaches to teaching and research.

1.2 Commitments already made in the official Bologna documents

The social dimension has been an integral part of the Bologna Process since the ministerial meeting in Prague. There are a number of common political commitments concerning the social dimension already made in the official Bologna documents. The commitments concern both the social dimension in the home country of the student and the social dimension of mobility. The commitments show that the social dimension is relevant to all action lines within the Process.

The social dimension in the home country of the student

1. Quality higher education should be equally accessible to all
   (Berlin and Bergen communiqués)

2. Students should have appropriate studying and living conditions, so that they can complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background (Berlin and Bergen communiqués)

3. Opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the lifelong learning paths into and within higher education should be improved (Berlin Communiqué)

4. Governments should take measures to provide students with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access (Bergen Communiqué)

5. Students are full partners in higher education governance and should participate in and influence the organisation and content of higher education
   (Prague and Berlin communiqués)

6. Governments should take measures to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects with a view to widening access (Bergen Communiqué)

The social dimension of mobility

7. Ministers should take measures to facilitate the portability of national loans and grants (Berlin and Bergen communiqués)

8. Mobility should be promoted by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:
   - for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
   - for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights
   (Bologna Declaration)

The ministers have also charged the Follow-up Group with presenting comparable data on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries.

1.3 Possible outcomes of the WG on the Social Dimension

Final report – suggested outline

1. Rationale for the social dimension

2. Commitments already made in the official Bologna documents

3. Current situation and data available (system descriptors and data)

4. Possible means of transforming political commitments into actions

5. Recommendations from the Working Group
   a, Strategic objective for the social dimension
   b, Continued work at national level and BFUG level

Recommendation for an overall strategic objective

There are considerable differences and challenges in relation to the social dimension of higher education between the participating countries. This needs to be acknowledged in the further development of the social dimension within the Process. Therefore, BFUG should not suggest a limited number of detailed actions that might be difficult or inappropriate to deliver for all countries involved.

Instead, the WG proposes that an overall objective for the social dimension should be agreed by the ministers, but that the means for reaching the objective should be adapted to national circumstances. The overall objective should reflect the importance of equal opportunities for access to and participation in quality higher education as well as widening access to and participation in quality higher education. It should also reflect the importance of ensuring successful completion of the studies. Furthermore, it should be made clear that equal opportunities should extend to all aspects of higher education. The WG suggests the following overall objective:

The student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of our populations.

Recommendations for continued work

The challenge is to formulate an overall objective to which the ministers can commit and to start a process towards achieving that objective in line with national priorities. Another challenge is to develop a basis for providing contextualised data that reflects the objective and enhances international comparability of the situation of the students. The development of the social dimension of higher education needs to be followed-up without creating simplistic comparisons between countries. Data should comprise system descriptors as well as information on how these systems work. The main challenge is the comparability and reliability of the information. Two other issues also arise: timing of survey and data results and what country coverage we can expect.

To meet these challenges the WG has a number of suggestions for measures to support the development towards the overall objective:

National level
- To develop national strategies for the social dimension of higher education for mobile as well as non-mobile students, including an action plan with measures for following up the impact of the plan.

BFUG level
- To address the identified data gaps.
- To enhance the comparability and reliability of student survey data and to complement them with contextualised information.
- To continue developing established contacts with statistical organisations and information networks.

2. Mobility of Students and Staff

2.1 Rationale

Mobility is beneficial for the mobile individual, but also for students and staff at the home institution. Mobility also has positive consequences for the quality of higher education and the higher education institutions as well as for society as a whole.

To experience another country and study environment gives the individual a new cultural, social and academic experience and creates opportunities for personal growth. This enhances the employability of the individual and possibilities to take advantage of an international labour market. Mobile students and staff also contribute to an internationalised environment at the host institutions. Staff mobility is a basis for student mobility, since it can create the mutual trust between institutions that is necessary for increased cooperation and recognition of study periods abroad.

The advantages for an individual can also be transferred to institutional assets. Through mobile individuals, in-coming and outgoing students as well as staff, higher education institutions gain new insights that challenge established traditions and practices. Mobility thereby provides possibilities for the development of academic work through new contacts and ideas as well as an opportunity for comparison and benchmarking between systems. Getting to know other institutions also lays the foundation for increased mutual trust between staff and institutions. Together with an open-minded atmosphere it reinforces international cooperation and networking and the development of the quality of higher education and research.

Increased mobility and transnational exchanges provide both cooperative and competitive advantages for society. Individuals with experience of other countries will hopefully also help to reduce cultural as well as language barriers between people, countries and cultures.

2.2 Commitments already made in the official Bologna documents

One of the key objectives when establishing the European Higher Education Area is to increase the opportunities for mobility of both students and staff. Most of the common political commitments made within the Bologna Process, for example concerning issues related to the three cycle system, recognition and quality assurance, aim at promoting mobility. These are some of the most prominent commitments regarding mobility in the official documents:

1. The Sorbonne declaration of 25th of May 1998 (…) emphasised the creation of the European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the Continent's overall development.
    (Bologna Declaration)

2. Mobility should be promoted by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:
    - for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
    - for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of

periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights
(Bologna Declaration)

3. Ministers emphasized the social dimension of mobility.
   (Prague Communiqué)

4. Ministers should take measures to facilitate the portability of national loans and grants
   (Berlin and Bergen communiqués)

5. Ministers call for increased mobility at the doctoral and postdoctoral levels and encourage the institutions concerned to increase their cooperation in doctoral studies and the training of young researchers.
   (Berlin Communiqué)

6. Ministers shall intensify their efforts to lift obstacles to mobility by facilitating the delivery of visa and work permits and by encouraging participation in mobility programmes.
   (Bergen Communiqué)

The ministers have also charged the Follow-up Group with presenting comparable data on the mobility of staff and students in participating countries.

2.3 Possible outcomes of the WG on Mobility of Students and Staff

Final report – suggested outline

1. Rationale for mobility

2. Commitments already made in the official Bologna documents

3. Current situation and data available (system descriptors and data)
   Mobility of students
   Mobility of staff

4. Obstacles to and actions to promote mobility

5. Recommendations from the Working Group
   Continued work at national level and BFUG level

Recommendations for continued work

The promotion of mobility of students and staff is at the core of the Bologna Process, but the free movement of these groups still face many challenges. Among the obstacles to mobility issues related to recognition and immigration feature prominently. Data are scarce and those that are there show significant weaknesses in giving a full picture of mobility. The challenges faced by the participating countries concern both mobility as such and finding comparable and reliable data that cover the actual mobility of students and staff regardless of the form and lengths of mobility periods as well as geographical destinations.

To meet these challenges the WG has a number of suggestions for measures to support the development of mobility:

National level
- To encourage and strengthen the national efforts to remove legal, administrative, financial, linguistic, cultural and other obstacles to mobility for students and staff.
- To focus on the main national challenges in order to promote mobility, such as visa regimes, the full implementation of established recognition procedures and creating incentives for mobility for both individuals and higher education institutions.
- To address the institutional attitude towards and responsibility for mobility.
- To focus on the social dimension of mobile students.

BFUG level
- To address the identified data gaps.
- To enhance the comparability and reliability of data on actual mobility.
- To continue developing established contacts with statistical organisations and information networks.
- To establish a working group to identify obstacles for mobility of staff and ways to overcome them before the ministerial meeting in 2009.