

Progress report from the joint chair of the Network of Experts on Student Support
For the BFUG meeting on 13 & 14 march 2008

The network held a meeting on 22 & 23 January in Stockholm, which was prepared by the joint chair. We attached to this report the draft notes of this meeting. Together with the draft notes we shared two interesting documents (also attached to this report):

- EU COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 23 November 2007 on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy
- SUMMARY of the presentations in the Nordic seminar on mobility, student financial aid and EU questions, held in Helsinki, 26–27 November 2007

During the meeting members of the network worked on:

- the virtual form and structure the network might have;
- the pilot on sharing data on individual students between countries / agencies;
- a template to define the content of a website for the network, to be filled in by the member states, sharing information and identifying contact persons;
- the contribution to the mobility conference in Brussels on 29 and 30 May 2008.

The joint chair would like to bring to the attention of the BFUG the following points:

- for the short the term, the Network can find a place on the Bologna Website, hosted by the secretariat;
- for the long term, we think it is necessary to have a more permanent structure to support the Network. It is important to make decisions on how to fund such a structure. As we understand it, this issue arises in other working groups as well;
- the activities of the working groups on stocktaking and on data collection can be supportive to the work of the Network;
- for the mobility conference in May our contribution will consist of presentations to illustrate the experiences of portable student support in a country that has had portable support for a very long time (Sweden), a country that just started to disburse portable support on a larger scale (Netherlands), a country that is in the process of investigating the feasibility of portable student support (Scotland) and a country that will probably not have portable support in the near future (to be confirmed).

The joint chair of the network,

a.m.t.inthout@minocw.nl

kathleen.robertson@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

johanna.wockatz@education.ministry.se

Bologna Process Network of Experts on Student Support

Notes of the meeting on 22-23 January 2008 in Stockholm, Sweden

1. Opening, welcome

The meeting was opened at 13h00 with a round of introduction.

Countries/organisations	Represented by:
Austria	Eduard Galler, Hermann Holubetz
Belgium (fr)	Kevin Guillaume
Denmark	Hanna Dam, Mia Wallin
England	Karen Duncan
EC	Jurgen Rienks
ESU	Kim Storkens
Finland	Lena Koskinen, Virpi Hiltunen
Georgia	Sophie Malashkhia
Ireland	Thérèse Gorman
Germany	Gottfried Krebs, Jörg Schubert
Lithuania	Aistė Urbonavičiūtė
Montenegro	Slobodanka Koprivica, Nada Kovac
Netherlands	Matyi Tegzess, Aldrik in 't Hout, Anne Lena Mietens
Norway	Ellen Smogeli, Hildrun Tyldum
Scotland	Kathleen Robertson, Miriam Craven
Sweden	Carina Isaksson, Linda Norman-Torvang, Johanna Wockatz

2. Introduction

Aldrik reminded everyone about the purpose of the network and what has been done so far. It was repeated that in the first meeting of the Expert Network in Lisbon, three working groups had been created. Kathleen presented the suggested projects and project plans of the project groups. In Lisbon the necessity of having a website which should provide information about student financial support and contact information of experts of the member countries of the Expert Network was agreed on. Miriam presented three different kinds of sites to show how a web site could be structured and with what kind of information. The Information data-base group was asked to specify the information wanted on the website in a template.

Furthermore it was reported that the Bologna secretariat has agreed to host the website initially but that they won't be able to update its content.

The project groups then worked during the afternoon.

Wednesday 23 January

3. Working groups: summing up the progress from the previous day's work.

The Pilot-data group informed the group that their discussions had focused on under which conditions the countries can exchange information with each other. The pilot-project between Austria and Germany had not been discussed yet, it was planned to that later during the day. The group was positive that the blueprint, template, and the list of contact persons could be finished within the next two months.

The information data-base group presented a list of wanted information together with a list of present information holders. In the discussion that followed the problem with translating existing information into English was raised. So was the question of technical assistance and a suggestion from the chair was to make an estimation of the costs for updating the website once it has been decided what the site should contain. In addition the point was made that it is necessary to have a concrete project to present for the stakeholders in order to get financing and to be able to get further with the project. The group was then asked to further specify the questions so that there could be no doubt of what is asked for and to limit the amount of questions so that giving this information is feasible.

The project groups then continued their work.

4. Discussion about the seminar in may 2008 (Kevin Guillaume and the Chairs)

The French Speaking Community of Belgium is organizing a conference on different aspects of mobility in higher education. The program of the first day is that in the morning key note speakers give speeches about mobility and mobility statistics. In the afternoon there are three working group sessions; Portability of student support, Asymmetric mobility, internationalisation and its influence on the Attractiveness of higher education. The role of the Expert Network depends on what we want to take on but an idea is to give a speech about the different situation in and the experiences of the three chair countries. The chairs asked to get some more time to discuss the role in the seminar. Kevin will get back on who will be invited to the seminar.

5. Working groups: summing up the progress from the meeting.

The Pilot-data exchange group reported that the work that will follow will focus on three points that Matyi – the project group leader – will elaborate further on. These are 1. a list of questions, 2. a menu of what info can be exchanged, 3. General numbers. The group has also divided the information needed into three types of data: 1) date of birth, sex, name, 2) type of grant, 3) period of time, double grant etc. The goal is to make a list of these questions and then each country answers which type of information they are interested in. The conclusion was that we can't establish a template for data collection but instead a checklist of questions. It would also be helpful if each country

could give information on how many students that took grants for a specific country (general numbers). This would lead to a first mapping of the grant-situation in Europe. Matyi will send an e-mail about this. As for the obstacles encountered the Pilot-data exchange group reported that there are some legal barriers that might be problematic – privacy acts.

The **Information database group** showed a revised list. The group's suggestion was that this list was sent around to the network members for comments. The chair will make sure that this is done. Afterwards should the members of the information database group fill in the up-dated template, so the information can be placed on the Bologna website.

6. Final items

- Aldrik showed the network members the Bologna website and how to access it. Here is the Username and Password:
Username: trinationes
Password: 1999-2009
- The notes from the meeting in Lisbon was adopted
- There was a round around the table where the countries gave their status on portable student support as well as other news in this area:

ESU – information about the mobility campaign which is arranged by ESU in cooperation with EI (Education International) The campaign will include some seminars, for example the student convention in October about validation, and also local campaigning.

Sweden – has portable support, nothing else to report

Norway – has portable support, the government is currently working on a white paper on internationalization in higher education, including student support

Denmark – has portable support and are introducing a portable grant for students to cover tuition fees – the taxameter system – for a maximum of two years

Germany – changed the system to make it easier to study in Europe and are introducing portable support for EU-member states. From the academic year 2008/2009 on German students will be able to take their grants and loans for a full program inside the EU and Switzerland.

Montenegro – Today no portable student support but a new model of financing higher education will be introduced.

Austria – will have mobility grants from the next academic year in the EU/EES.

The Netherlands – started with portable student support worldwide in September 2007. The Netherlands also informed about the EC-case Förster [C-158/07](#) and proceedings are due this spring.

European Commission – informed the group that there is a resolution decided by the ministers that invites the member countries to offer the widest form possible of portability of student support. Jurgen also informed the group that mobility will be high on the agenda during the French presidency and also suggested that Eurydice and Enic/Naric are invited to the conference in Brussels in May.

England – no portable support today but there is a political interest. England will introduce a loan repayment holiday which means that the repayment period does not have to start directly after the studies are finished.

Belgium (fr) – no portable support today. Kevin gave some practical information about the conference 29-30 May in Brussels. The content of this bologna event will be Asymmetric mobility and there is a wish to discuss the inconvenient truths about mobility from the perspective of different stakeholders (see under 4.).

Lithuania – does not have portable support today but in some years it might exist for short-term studies abroad.

Scotland – does not have portable support today. A feasibility-study is being carried out by the Scottish Government with the student support agency at the moment.

Ireland – has portable student support to EU-member states at undergraduate level (to publicly funded universities). Ireland also have a central database on students on its way.

Georgia – does not have portable support today but have some funding available for tuition fees at master degree in a presidential fund. Today legislation barriers exist against portable support.

Finland – has portable support, asks the chairs to send out the summary from the Nordic seminar on mobility, student financial aid and EU-questions.

Finally Aldrik summed up the progress made and talked about the next steps for the working groups. Kathleen appealed to the network to take responsibility and make use of the existing contact lists to make the network a reality.

7. Next meetings/time schedule

- a) The chair will send the draft minutes together with a template for members of the network to comment on. Together with this comment the contact information of experts dealing with student support for nationals outside their country and foreign students inside their country should be provided. Both on the policy-level and at the agency-level. The Network members are asked to send their feedback no later than 29th February.
- b) The Chairs will make contact with Eurydice and Enic/Naric as well as with the chairs of the Working Groups on Data-collection and Stocktaking.. The chair will inform the BFUG secretariat about the next steps for the Network website and ideas about layout. The BFUG will receive a report about the progress the Network is making.
- c) In the end of March the Network members will receive the information database template. The members of the Information data-base group will be asked to answer the questions. The filled in templates will be sent to the Chair, which will check and forward them to the BFUG secretariat.
- d) The Chair announced that there might not be a meeting in Glasgow in April depending on what's possible to work out by e-mail.
- e) The Mobility Conference in Brussels takes place the 29-30 of May.

9. Closing

The meeting was closed at 16h00

Annex 2: Information database group template suggestion

1. Is institution/course accredited in national system of HE? [LINK](#)
 - a. Level?
 - b. Is NQF self-certified to QF/EQF
 - c. IS QAA in the QA-register
2. Structure of student support system
 - a. Grants
 - i. Target group/amount/main conditions
 - b. Loans
 - i. Target group/amount/main conditions
 - c. Specific allowances
 - i. Housing/maternity etc.
 - d. Is support portable?
 - i. Conditions
 - ii. What does the support cover(travel, tuition etc.)?
 - e. Is support available for incoming students?
 - i. Is it portable for incoming students?
 - ii. Conditions
 - f. Fees
 - i. Who has the right to set the amount?
 - ii. Is it covered by student support?
 - iii. Difference between EU/Non-EU?
 - g. Do you have a national center for student mobility? [LINK](#)
3. Other project group
 - a. Under what conditions exchange of info on individuals
4. What body/institution is in charge of student support?
 - a. Agency [LINK/Website](#)
 - b. HEI [LINK/Website](#)
 - c. As expert, who can I contact?
 - i. Policy level (country/agency) *Name, phone, e-mail*
 - ii. Practical level (agency/HEI) *name, phone, e-mail*
5. Responsibility for National contribution to website
 - a. Agency? – *reference on website*
 - b. Updates – *dates of entry/sell-by date?*
6. Expert web/virtual community
 - a. Wiki
 - b. Info queries
 - c. News
 - d. Legal repository

Follow-up

- Design of website?
- Availability of information from other sources
 - Easy accessible?
 - Up-to-date?
 - Contact with other sources

SUMMARY

**on the presentations in the Nordic seminar
on mobility, student financial aid and EU questions
Helsinki, 26–27 November 2007**

MONDAY, 26 November 2007

Opening of the conference

Minister of Culture and Sport Stefan Wallin opened the conference and warmly welcomed the participants to the Nordic conference on student financial aid. In his address, Minister Wallin highlighted the importance of joint meetings and cooperation between ministries and authorities and that the special task for the conference was to find a new model for smoothly running cooperation between the Nordic student financial aid authorities.

Mobility and student financial aid

*Student mobility within the Nordic area and between the Nordic area and other countries
Ilpo Lahtinen, Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA), Finland:*

Ilpo Lahtinen presented the report of the Nordic student financial aid group (ASIN). KELA is responsible for ASIN reports on student financial aid in the Nordic countries, on the number of Nordic students entitled to student financial aid abroad and on foreign students entitled to student financial aid in a Nordic country (in Swedish at www.fpa.fi/in/internet/svenska.nfs/alias/student).

According to Lahtinen, statistics show that the number of degree students abroad has gone down (from 50,000 to 40,000). In the Nordic area, however, the trend has been upward (from 6,000 to 8,000 since the turn of the century). Statistics show similarities between Finland and Denmark in financial aid and student mobility. These countries offer the smallest grants for studies abroad (the larger the grant the more students abroad).

The number of foreign recipients of student financial aid varies from Iceland's 0.5% to Norway's and Sweden's 5.6 %. The rejection percentage is around 7% in Finland, Iceland and Norway and 23% in Sweden. Statistics do not give an answer to the question: "Are there border obstacles?", one reason being that the grounds for rejection cannot be compared. An important goal for authorities, despite different legislations, is to make sure that no Nordic student studying in a Nordic country is left without student financial aid.

Lahtinen also spoke about the Nordic review conducted by the Nordic student financial aid authorities. It comprises a survey and analysis of financial aid for studies abroad. Its purpose is to illuminate the similarities and differences in financial aid for studies abroad (KELA publication 2006). A follow-up study will be ready in 2008.

Mobility and student financial aid

Leena Koskinen, Ministry of Education, Finland

At this point the discussion concerned the content and importance of the student financial aid and the Nordic model. Studies abroad are supported but the rationale is nonetheless utilitarian: the native country provides support but the student is expected to return. The EU regulations also entail that mobile work force (including family members) are supported. In other parts of Europe, countries are only beginning to extend benefits to studies abroad.

Leena Koskinen noted that ever since the 1950s it has been possible to get support for studies abroad. In the 1970s Finns went to Sweden. Internationalisation began to be promoted in the 1980s. The aim was to enable as many students as possible to take part of their studies abroad.

All the Nordic countries award larger grants for studies abroad. In Norway, Sweden and Iceland, the aid also provides for travel expenses and tuition fees. Denmark is starting to grant aid towards tuition fees to a limited extent. This is reflected in the number of students going to the USA and Australia to study. In Finland, the aid is smaller and, covering part of costs, mainly encourages studies in which there are no tuition fees. Intakes in Finland have been increased but it may still be easier to gain admission abroad. Finland adopted a system of tax concessions for student financial aid in 2005. This mainly benefits those who have taken larger study loans owing to studied abroad.

In conclusion, Leena Koskinen discussed internationalisation and asked whether it would be expedient to encourage more students to study for their whole degree abroad. One problem with internationalisation is that degrees awarded abroad are not always recognised in the student's home country. The desire to graduate as quickly as possible makes it more attractive to do the whole degree in the home country. One should not forget the students' own preferences as to what and where to study. According to Swedish participants, Sweden is not after any particular internationalisation process by means of the student financial aid system. In Denmark, the economic considerations are often regarded as decisive.

EC law and student financial aid

Johan Nylander, CSN, Sweden:

Johan Nylander presented the foreign students unit at the central student aid agency CSN. The unit appraises the right of non-citizens to Swedish student financial aid under Swedish legislation and EC regulations implemented in Swedish legislation. According to Nylander, prior to Sweden's membership in the EU it was fairly easy for the CSN to know what rules applied and how they

should be applied. Sweden is the only Nordic country where student financial aid is part of family benefits, which, under Regulation 1408/71, must be coordinated to avoid overlapping.

Regulation 1612/68 is the primary statute governing deliberations in the CSN. It provides for freedom of movement for workers and their dependents within the Community. Under certain conditions these are "compared to Swedish citizens" as regards student financial aid. According to Nylander, the concept of worker is not defined robustly enough to be useful for the CSN. Guidelines can be found in EC case law and the CSN constantly follows the work of the EC Court of Justice for further clarification of the concept. According to Nylander, the CSN has a system in which various definitions have cross-references to Court rulings and the definitions are easily accessible for use in daily work.

Over the past years the CSN has had to amend its regulations because of Directive 2004/38 (mobility); Directive 2003/109 (third-country nationals who are long-term residents); and Directive 2005/71 (visiting researchers who are third-country nationals). All of these regulate entitlement to student financial aid. There are also new Directives being drafted but it is not yet known to what extent they will influence the right to student financial aid in Sweden.

According to Nylander, there is a big difference between the time when Sweden itself enacted all statutes and today's situation. The CSN consults the immigration agency and cooperates with ASIN. There is a system for exchanging information so that a country that discovers for instance an EC ruling relevant to student financial aid informs the other Member States. The CSN hopes that this collaboration will continue and will be further developed.

Free mobility and discrimination

Satu Paasilehto, Ministry of Education, Finland:

This section concerned student mobility, EC law and student financial aid. According to Paasilehto, there are contradictions in students' free mobility and the national education systems. Student mobility burdens the EU member countries in different ways. The major languages, such as English, German and French are the most attractive to students.

There is a clear contradiction between the EU's aspirations to welfare society and its possibilities and competence in this area. According to Paasilehto, this is also a question of solidarity: how does one share welfare? There is a conflict between individual rights and social security (national legislation v. EC legislation).

Paasilehto also touched upon the new Lisbon Treaty, which is to replace the previously proposed EU constitution. The Treaty will be signed by the heads of state of the EU Member States on 13 December 2007 and is projected to be ratified during 2008, so that it can take effect before the European Parliament elections 2009. The new Treaty is designed to create a more democratic and open EU and provide more rights to EU citizens, but does not solve the problem of mobility and student financial aid.

ESA cases

Ellen Smogeli, Ministry of Education and Research, Norway:

Ellen Smogeli raised the question that entitlement to financial aid for studies abroad is conditional on residence (min. 2 yrs over the past 5 yrs). This requirement applies to both citizens and non-citizens. According to Smogeli, the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) questions the validity of the residence condition on financial aid for studies outside the Nordic area. According to ESA, a loan/grant is a social benefit and intended for both employees and their family members. The ESA finds the residence requirement discriminatory since it is easier for Norwegian citizens to fulfil it than for others. According to the Norwegian aid authorities, the requirement is justified. It takes longer to establish connections with Norway than to gain a worker status. The requirement of residence is also applied in the other Nordic countries.

TUESDAY, 27 November 2007

Exchange of information between aid authorities - experiences and development needs
Jan Erik Brunnberg, CSN, Sweden:

Jan Erik Brunnberg presented the results of a survey conducted in the Nordic countries and the autonomous regions last autumn. The purpose was to gain an overall picture of how information is exchanged between the Nordic countries. It transpired that there are risks that student financial aid is incorrectly granted in two countries at the same time. The communication between authorities is managed manually and is time-consuming.

All the Nordic countries are calling for some type of technical development to facilitate reporting between them. The lack of common identity numbers or other common means of identification is a problem. All the countries want to be able to check data against other EU countries. This entails a shared minimum definition of student financial aid and legislation providing for exchange of information between all the EU/EEA countries.

Brunnberg also put forward a short- and long-term proposal for exchange of information. As a short term solution facilitating communication, education/study data could be collected and sent by each country four times a year, with prioritised re-check in each country.

The long-term solution is that the Nordic student financial aid group (ASIN) undertakes a pilot project on closer cooperation with the Baltic states in order to develop procedures for exchanging information between the countries. According to Brunnberg, this would also be in line with the projected input by the Nordic Council of Ministers in the near future.

International cooperation and exchange of information in social security questions
Essi Rentola, Social Insurance Institution, Finland:

Essi Rentola discussed the Nordic Social Security Convention and EC Directive 1408/71, as well as measures to improve exchange of information between Nordic countries. According to her, there are plans for adopting electronic exchange of information between authorities in the EU by 2009.

Containing provisions applicable to those not gainfully employed, the Nordic Social Security Convention applies to students. There is also an administrative agreement relating to the Convention; its Article 4 regulates population bookkeeping between the countries. Rentola pointed out that there are different interpretations as regards students who study in another Nordic country for more than 6 months but less than 12 months. In this case, the studies are usually considered temporary and the students come under the legislation of the sending country.

Rentola raised the question of sickness allowance. Unlike Finland, in other Nordic countries entitlement to sickness allowance is part of student financial aid. Rentola said that the Nordic social insurance group will meet to discuss the problem of sickness allowance, among other things.

Rentola pointed out that cooperation between liaison bodies, working groups and social insurance authorities makes for better sharing of information between the Nordic countries.

Student funding and mobility - What can we learn from international comparisons?

Dr Dominic Orr, HIS, Hochschul-Informations-System, Germany

http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tapahtumakalenteri/2007/11/Liitteet_studerandemobilitet/Dominic_Orr_helsinki_211107.pdf:

Dr Orr presented the Eurostudent project, which reviews the social and financial situation of higher education students in the European countries. He focused on questions like equity in mobility. Mobility is steered by economic factors, but who benefits from mobility: the students, the higher education institution or the labour market? Likewise: what is the "right" number of students studying abroad?

Eurostudent gauged the parents' education and status in the labour market. Orr called for comparative research combining qualitative and quantitative methods to find out the individual and economic aspects. The Eurostudent III report will be published in 2008. Eurostudent II (2005) can be accessed at http://www.bmbf.de/pub/eurostudent_report_2005.pdf.

Reviews of innovation, research and education
Jannecke Wiers-Jensen, NIFUSTEP, Norway:

Wiers-Jensen spoke about the ongoing review of the social and individual effects of studies abroad. The study is coordinated by Norway and conducted by a team in Finland, in the Faroe Islands and in Iceland.

The purpose is to analyse the social and individual motives for studies abroad. According to Wiers-Jensen, the review has shown that young Norwegians have greater expectations of the value of a foreign degree on the labour market than it actually has. An earlier Swedish study found the same. There will be a Nordic report in 2008 in addition to the national reports. It will be presented at the next Nordic conference in the Faroe Islands.

Student perspective

Johanna Nuorteva, Social Policy Secretary, National Union of University Students in Finland:

In her address Johanna Nuorteva focused on free education, the two-cycle degree system, comparability in the European credit transfer system, and the importance for students of having their international studies recognised by their own university. Nuorteva emphasised that the objective for the international student movement is that the student financial aid covers full-time study and the extra costs incurring from studies abroad. According to Nuorteva, every country must assume its responsibility for enhancing mobility. Mobility and internationalisation are in the interest of society as a whole.

Closing of the conference

Summary

Joint Nordic meetings and cooperation at the authorities level are important, not only nationally but also internationally. Student financial aid is crucial for international mobility. This entails closer contacts amongst authorities responsible for students' income in different countries.

The meeting was closed with thanks to Finland for hosting the conference.