



## **Berlin Declaration on the Social Dimension**

### **Recommendations for strong student affairs and services in Europe**

#### *The Three Pillars of Higher Education*

Research - teaching - student affairs and services: these are the pillars of well-performing higher education systems. Excellence in education calls for excellent social infrastructures and support mechanisms for students. Student affairs and services, therefore, are an important component of the social dimension, and a key factor for the success of the European Higher Education area. The social dimension is shaped not only by student affairs and services, but also includes the social responsibility of higher education institutions, government agencies on various levels, students' organisations, and other important factors that make up the social infrastructure of higher education.

#### *Student Affairs and Services in Europe*

The European Higher Education Area is shaped by student affairs and services as an important aspect of the social dimension - but they are organized differently across Europe. Depending on educational policies and priorities, the structure, financing and autonomy of universities, and the history and tradition of higher education systems, differences exist in the way the social support of students is organized around the world. A particularly large and rich variety exists in the ways that services are being provided to young Europeans and Internationals in tertiary education. In some countries, e.g. in France, Germany and Italy, student services are being provided by public or non-profit institutions outside the universities, offering their support to all students from different higher education institutions in one city or region. In other countries, such as Poland or the United Kingdom, universities provide these services themselves, but only to their own students. In many countries, services are also being provided by students themselves. The diversity of this situation holds the potential for benchmarking, and the exchange of best practices, and for mutual learning outcomes in the context of exchanges between students, university staff, and student services/affairs professionals.

#### *Berlin Conference on Student Affairs and Services*

Meeting in Berlin for an international conference on the social dimension of the Bologna process, student affairs and services professionals have discussed common guidelines and recommendations for an inclusive and diverse, yet strong and efficient, social infrastructure of higher education.

The conference has analysed the social and economic situation of students in Europe, looking at current developments of higher education institutions, the needs of students and the expectations of universities. Based on current research on the effects and impact that student affairs and services can have on students' academic success and educational development, the strategic role of student affairs and services in higher education has become evident in recent years. Looking at different situations in various countries, case studies have shown the state-of-the-art of student affairs and services in Europe, looking at relevant practices, existing models, strengths and weaknesses as well as challenges for student affairs and services.

The conference conclusions have underlined: student services enable access to higher education, study retention and study success.



### *Developing the Social Dimension - Principles and Recommendations*

In this light, the following recommendations are put forward not only to strengthen the academic success of the European Higher Education area, but to ground it in a solid social infrastructure for successful studying.

With regard to the provision of service, students in Europe have a right to a strong social infrastructure: they need broadly accessible and sufficient study financing, affordable student housing and dining services, professional counselling in academic, social and psychological matters, and support for international mobility. They also need special services such as child care, support for students with disabilities or diseases, or with learning difficulties. Furthermore, different groups of students such as students with children, older or part-time students, working students and students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds need targeted services meet their specific needs.

The conference has shown: the demand on student affairs and services grows, expressed by European Students and international students, coming from countries outside from Europe. Surveys of the younger past, presented by the European University Association (EUA) or Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) underline the need on students support. In fact, student affairs and services organizations in Europe - operating inside and outside higher education Institutions - are the best providers of such a support structure both for students in tertiary education as well as for the higher education institutions themselves. They are the key players to develop and strengthen the social dimension.

Certainly, the ways in which student affairs and services are provided differ from one context to the next, and depend on the history, societal context, and tradition of higher education. But the services provided touch very similar issues, and share convergent goals. This rich diversity in the institutional setup of student affairs and services in Europe is no obstacle to a shared vision of what student affairs and services could include and should offer to students and universities. On the contrary, it allows for exchange of professional experience, transfer of knowledge, and peer-learning to achieve more and better social support for more students.

Generally, student affairs and services should be guided by the following objectives:

- To provide affordable services for all students in higher education
- To support and widen access to higher education
- To support student retention and speedy graduation
- To provide an adequate social and economic support structure, e.g. in the form of affordable housing and food, social and counselling services, financial aid etc.
- To provide, administer, or consult on study financing
- To provide free information and counselling on social, financial and psychological or health issues
- To tailor services to specific groups such as first-generation or minority students
- To pursue a student-centred approach and develop student-friendly administrative processes
- To improve cooperation between student services and higher education institutions
- To undertake impact evaluations whenever possible



In order to achieve these goals, student affairs and services therefore call upon governments in Europe to recognize:

- the importance of higher education as a public good
- that the Social Dimension will increase the human capital available and more talent will ensure a sustainable knowledge based society
- that the social dimension in Higher Education will increase Social Cohesion in Europe

And therefore

- To define specific targets for the development of the social dimension of higher education
- To provide adequate funding not only for research and teaching, but equally for the support of students in social, economic, cultural, psychological and health matters
- To improve access to higher education for underrepresented groups, in order to make the student population representative of the society at large
- To maintain strong student participation in all matters that concern their academic and personal development in higher education
- To promote the history and tradition of the European university city, with its strong integration of academic life and institutions into the society at large
- To provide support for the exchange of experiences and peer-to-peer training of professionals in student affairs and services across the globe
- To establish a staff exchange mechanism or program for student affairs and services within Europe

The ministers responsible for higher education of the Bologna area have repeatedly stressed the importance of the social dimension.<sup>1</sup> Following this line, UNESCO has called on all member states to provide adequate student services.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to these policy developments, action is now needed to follow-up on the promises that have been made by governments and international organisations.

The conference conclusions underlined the need to continue efforts for accessible, professional, and adequate services for all students in Europe, to continue the cooperation of student affairs and services with students, university faculty and administrative staff, policy makers, and other important actors in order to make the social dimension a reality and a key pillar in higher education in Europe.

Berlin, 13th of July, 2011

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<sup>1</sup> See annex for complete citations

<sup>2</sup> Final communiqué of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, Paris, July 8, 2009, Paragraph 51 point I (Source: [http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/WCHE\\_2009/FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20WCHE%202009.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/WCHE_2009/FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20WCHE%202009.pdf) visited on July 13, 2011)



## ANNEX

Berlin Communiqué 2003 (Preamble): “We [the ministers] reaffirm the importance of the social dimension”.

Source: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Berlin\\_Communique1.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Berlin_Communique1.pdf)

Bergen Communiqué 2005 (Chapter III): “The social dimension [...] is a constituent part of the EHEA and a necessary condition for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA. We therefore renew our commitment to making quality higher education equally accessible to all.”

Source: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Bergen\\_Communique1.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Bergen_Communique1.pdf)

London Communiqué 2007 (Par. 2.18): “We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services.”

Source: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/London\\_Communique18May2007.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/London_Communique18May2007.pdf)

Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009 (Par 9) : “The student body within higher education should reflect the diversity of Europe’s population. We therefore emphasize the social characteristics of higher education.”

Source: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Leuven\\_Louvain-la-Neuve\\_Communicu%C3%A9\\_April\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communicu%C3%A9_April_2009.pdf)

Budapest-Vienna Declaration 2010 (Par. 11):” [We] reaffirm that higher education is a public responsibility. [...] We shall therefore increase our efforts on the social dimension in order to provide equal opportunities to quality education, paying particular attention to underrepresented groups.”

Source: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Budapest-Vienna\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf)

### More information:

[www.student-affairs.eu](http://www.student-affairs.eu)

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