**2nd Meeting of the BFUG Working Group on**

**Social Dimension**

DBB Forum, Berlin, 11 July 2011

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**Participants:**

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| **Nr.** | **Country/ Organisation** | **Name** |
| 1. | Spain | Rafael Bonete (Co-Chair) |
| 2. | Ireland | Brian Power (Co-Chair) |
| 3. | Andorra | Mar Martínez |
| 4. | Croatia | **Thomas Farnell** |
| 5. | France | Fabien Emmanuelli |
| 6. | Germany | Achim Meyer auf der Heyde |
| 7. | The Netherlands | Trinh Ngo |
| 8. | Norway | Gro Beate Vige |
| 9. | European Commission | Lene Oftedal |
| 10. | EUA | Ralf Drachenberg |
| 11. | ESU | Florian Kaiser |
| 12 | ESU | Allan Päll |
| 13. | EUROSTUDENT | Dominic Orr |
| 14. | BFUG Secretariat | Ligia Deca |
| 15. | BFUG Secretariat | Melinda Szabó |

**Apologies:** Austria, BUSINESSEUROPE, Belgium/Flemish Community, EURASHE, Scotland.

The Chairs welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the German organisers for hosting this meeting. A tour de table followed with a short introduction of all the participants.

1. Adoption of the minutes from the previous Social Dimension Working Group meeting in Madrid, 20 May 2010.

The minutes of the last Social Dimension WG meeting, which took place in Madrid on 20 May 2010, were adopted.

The Co-Chair (Spain) of the Working Group explained that due to the new position he had taken up in Paris it was difficult to arrange for another meeting in Madrid and thanked the WG members for their understanding.

1. Discussion on EUROSTUDENT’s concept proposal for the establishment of a **European Observatory on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (EOSDHE).**

Dominic Orr (EUROSTUDENT) gave a short description of the European Observatory on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (EOSDHE) concept proposal. The first two objectives of the Observatory are directly connected with the Terms of Reference of the SD WG and constitute the passive aims of the project, while the third objective was conceived as more of an active component of the project. The third objective would aim to offer a mechanism for the evaluation of national practices and policies in the area of social dimension. In each case, a team of international experts would be put together in consultation with the relevant ministry and this expert team would review the country’s social dimension policies and make recommendations based on their international experience.

A discussion on the active function of the Observatory (EOSDHE) followed. Since the Chair (Spain) expressed some concerns regarding the support of the third objective of the Observatory by the BFUG members and ministries, a debate arose on how the third function of the Observatory could be included at this point.

* Croatia inquired if the project needs to involve only ministries responsible for higher education and whether the reviews organised by the Observatory could work directly with national student organisations. EUROSTUDENT replied that due to the nature of the project (which reflects initiatives and national policies in the area of social dimension) ministries would need to be supportive of such an initiative. The Observatory is meant to gather and disseminate good practices in general, create peer-learning experiences and could use data from EURYDICE and EUROSTUDENT.
* Norway added that it’s difficult to start this project with 47 countries, so a feasibility study would be a much more suitable approach. Student involvement in such an initiative goes without saying, so the European Students’ Union (ESU) should be a part of the project’s consortium.
* Germany recognised that it would be difficult to have countries paying for their evaluation at this stage. The first step would be to collect the updated national action plans on social dimension and evaluate them. Also concrete activities in this field should be collected.
* The Netherlands stated that there is a certain resistance in collecting the needed information. The Netherlands had worked for ensuring study success and it proved difficult to extend it to other countries due to the differences in ensuring the same definitions.
* ESU stressed the need to activate countries in their work on social dimension and that without acting as a benchmarking tool the Observatory would have an exclusively passive role. They stressed that the Observatory should have an active component of providing policy recommendations and guidance.
* EUROSTUDENT agreed on the challenges posed by the third objective of the project and also explained that it was considered as a final goal of the other two objectives, which have more a passive character of their aims. With respect to the involvement of countries in the project, it suggested that it might be a good idea to have a national group of experts for countries that would like to be involved in the Observatory.
* Norway stated that countries in the Bologna Process are already undergoing reviews on some areas of relevance to the social dimension of higher education, as part of the follow-up of some Council of Europe Conventions and Treaties, and that the proposal on the Observatory should take account of this. Of particular relevance are the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Council of Europe’s independent human rights monitoring body specialised in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and intolerance.”
* The Chair (Ireland) recommended starting the third strand of the project with a small number of volunteer countries. These countries would also be the ones already interested in the social dimension area. Highlighting the track record of these countries would provide an incentive and would encourage others to participate in the country’s evaluation exercise as well. The Observatory would work similarly to the mechanism of an Open Method of Coordination, by using a peer learning system instead of a scoreboard. A gradual build-up approach would be recommended by starting the project with what would effectively be a feasibility study.
* The European Commission concurred that the Observatory would in fact help countries, which have already agreed in the frame of the Bologna Process to achieve such goals in the social dimension (social inclusion, widening access, etc). The Observatory would be a place where countries or institutions could go and find information on how to improve their situation.
* EUROSTUDENT stated that the project would need to have a certain active component so that the Observatory does not seem to have a repetitive function as the data collection process has been done.

The group agreed that the solution to the third function of the Observatory would be to apply for inclusion of the evaluation component for a sample of countries in a pilot project proposal. These countries would volunteer to be involved in an initial round of external reviews and, if the quality and usefulness of these reviews were proven to be of benefit to the countries concerned, then it would be much more likely that other countries would seek to be included in the review programme as well. For ensuring its financial sustainability the project proposal could be submitted within the LLP KA4 Valorisation project call[[1]](#footnote-1) next year.

The Chair (Spain) concluded by asking EUROSTUDENT to rewrite the project proposal with a more voluntary character for the third Observatory function. The redrafted proposal would be sent to the SD WG by 10 September 2011, so that it could also be sent for the BFUG meeting in Cracow in October.

It was also agreed that:

* Students (ESU) would be included as a partner in the development of the Observatory;
* A pilot study/ feasibility study would be developed as a project application to kick-start the project;
* LLP funding should be accessed; therefore countries, which can be included in such a framework would be approached in this sense by EUROSTUDENT.

1. Analysis of the **first set of results on the Data Collection exercise on Social Dimension**.

The participants were invited to give initial feedback on the first results on Social Dimension chapter prepared by the Data Collectors. The Secretariat will gather any detailed inputs from the members of the Social Dimension WG and send them for consideration to the Reporting WG. **Any additional comments of individual SD WG members for the first draft of the chapter should come by 31 August.**

With respect to the structure and general direction of the chapter, the SD WG members have raised the following points:

* Norway suggested an introduction of a general differentiation between public and private higher education and an explanation on which sector the analysis mainly focuses on. There is an impression within the report that comments are provided only for the public part of the higher education system; in this respect the private higher education institutions should be also mentioned. On immigration it is important to look at the differences in HE attainment between 1st and 2nd generation of immigrants. For example, Norway has first generation immigrants who cannot read or write, but also a second generation of immigrants with a high rate of success in entering and completing higher education.
* EUROSTUDENT provided an overview on the approach for writing the chapter and the current debates and challenges ahead, such as the challenge to link data analysis and the BFUG policy questionnaire analysis. For immigration, data was provided from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), but some components are still lacking and so it might be difficult to be able to differentiate between various situations (e.g. 1st and 2nd generation of immigrants).
* Croatia appreciated the excellent sources of information provided by this chapter. However, although the report shows a comparative mapping of tendencies, the report contains little critical analysis of the data provided (what country is more equitable, what are the policies that countries are successful on etc). There is also a lack of analysis of the effects of the policies chosen by countries and of the policy implications of the findings. Croatia admitted it was unlikely that such analyses could be made for this report due to lack of time and resources, but suggested that reports should perhaps use a more nuanced analysis which could also include contributions by academics and experts in order to better interpret the collected data.[[2]](#footnote-2) Croatia also suggested the introduction of ***a comparative matrix*** with country lines (or as individual country fact sheets) outlining what measures linked to social dimension each country are currently undertaking. EUROSTUDENT responded that such matrices should be possible to create based on the collected data.
* The Netherlands inquired on the style of the report, whether the report is meant to have only facts and figures, if it’s meant to provide a more normative approach or if it aims to make concrete recommendations. EUROSTUDENT replied that the report mixes styles and this will indeed be improved. However, the integrated report should have a similar style throughout the chapters.
* The European Commission stated that it is extremely important to have a relevant text giving an interpretation for all the facts and figures, while ensuring that the chapter is offering an overarching analysis of the large amount of data collected. It would be also helpful to analyse past data in order to identify different trends. EUROSTUDENT added that the chapter should be shorter and the amount of data collected so far is in fact massive, so there are opportunities for further analysis. In the end, the authors should be clear on what the report can and can’t show.
* Norway pointed out the need to acknowledge that the questionnaire structure was partially also the responsibility of the members of the SD WG, since they were part in its design. If certain relevant questions were missed out or found irrelevant, that would be worth discussing in the next SD WG meeting in order to make proposals for the reporting following the Bucharest ministerial meeting.
* The BFUG Secretariat clarified a point inquired by the members regarding the 2012 scorecard indicators. Currently the proposal for the 2012 scorecard indicators is being prepared by the Reporting WG and would be presented at the next BFUG meeting in October. The scorecard indicators would generally be the same as in the past exercises, but proposals for scorecard indicators that could be added for the 2015 Report on Bologna Process implementation.

The Chair (Ireland) asked the BFUG Secretariat to return the general overview of the discussions to the data collectors after their endorsement by the SD WG (the draft minutes will be circulated preferably by Wednesday, 13 July). The SD WG members would send specific individual comments on the SD chapter to the BFUG Secretariat, related to general direction, style and structure, by 31 August 2011 and the BFUG Secretariat will forward these points to the data collectors and all the SD WG members.

1. Analysis of gathered **examples of good practice** as outlined in the WG’s Terms of Reference:

* Collection of good practices in Social Dimension implementation in Higher Education at national and regional level;
* Collection of measures taken in other parts of the educational system within the EHEA in order to increase the level of equity in Higher Education;
* Collections of good practices and national experiences in defining core indicators used for measuring and monitoring the relevant aspects of Social Dimension in Higher Education;
* Collecting information of successful stories of improving employability due to the good practices of HEIs.

With respect to this point of the agenda it was agreed that **the BFUG Secretariat would categorise the good practice examples and will make them more easily available on the EHEA website.**

The members of the WG have used different styles and formats when preparing their national or institutional good practices. The Chair (Ireland) stated that if there were a categorisation model provided for the good practices on social dimension implementation, this would also provide an indication to others of the type of information they could provide for different other points of the classification categories.

1. Discussion on the **Social Dimension Working Group Draft Report** for the BFUG meeting in Cracow.

The SD WG report should be presented at the BFUG meeting in January 2012, so that the group can meet one more time in October/ November 2011 and discuss the draft and conclusions/ recommendations. The report of the Social Dimension WG would reflect activities carried out by the WG according to their Terms of Reference. The BFUG Secretariat will circulate the last SD Coordination Group report (2009) for consultation.

1. Any other business.

The next meeting’s date was proposed to be either Friday 4th or Friday 25th of November. The BFUG Secretariat will send these two alternatives to the SD WG members and see which date is the best for most participants. The meeting should ideally take place in Brussels and, when a date has been agreed, the SD WG members will check to see who could provide the necessary logistical requirements to host it.

The Chairs thanked everyone for their participation and contributions for this meeting.

1. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/llp/doc/call11/fiches/valor1_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Example: the EQUNET report “Evolving diversity: an overview of equitable access to HE in Europe“+”: <http://repository.equnet.info/50/1/Evolving_Diversity.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)