



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI NAȚIONALE



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ADVISORY GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION SECOND MEETING Brussels (Belgium), 29 March 2019

Minutes

List of participants

Delegation	First Name	Surname
Austria	Marita	Gasteiger
Austrian Student Ombudsman	Josef	Leidenfrost
Belgium – Flemish Community	Willems	Patrick
Croatia (Co-chair)	Ninoslav	Šćukanec Schmidt
(National Union of Students in) Denmark	Julian	Lo Curlo
ESU (Co-chair)	Robert	Napier
ESU	Marta	Sierra
EUA	Henriette	Stoeber
European Commission	Klara	Engels-Perenyi
European Commission	Kinga	Szuly
Eurostudent	Martin	Unger
Germany	Ronja	Hesse
Luxembourg	Isabelle	Reinhardt
Poland	Magdalena	Wróbel
Romania	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
United Kingdom	John	Storan
BFUG Secretariat	Giovanni	Finocchietti
BFUG Secretariat	Susanna	Taormina

Apologies from: Bulgaria, EI-ETUCE, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Sweden, United Kingdom (Scotland).



1. Welcome remarks and approval of agenda

The Head of Unit of Higher Education of the European Commission, Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, welcomed the participants. The Co-chairs Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Croatia) and Robert Napier (ESU) thanked the European Commission for hosting the meeting, welcomed the participants and introduced the Meeting. The Agenda was approved without modifications.

Henriette Stoeber from the EUA asked that these minutes of the meeting in Brussels contain her remarks from previous meeting in Zagreb:

- The future document 'Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension' should not contain too prescriptive recommendations for higher education institutions (HEI). Henriette stressed that the work of the EHEA bodies is directed towards government bodies responsible for the management of HE systems, and in terms of recommendations, how they may support and enhance the work of higher education institutions. This should be carefully reflected in the wording of the P&Gs.

Co-chairs also informed the participants that the topic of the breakout sessions at the meeting in Brussels would include discussions about the content of the future document. All the participants will make a joint conclusion during breakout groupwork on how to approach the further work related to the formulation of principles and guidelines for the social dimension.

2. Summary of main outputs from the Zagreb meeting: how will they guide our future work?

The Co-chair Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt was the presenter of the topic. He gave an overview of the outputs of the first meeting of the AG (Zagreb, 19.02.2019), introducing the vision of the future Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) for the Social Dimension (SD) in the form of a short policy document, with PAGs addressing specific target groups, and ensuring synergies among different policy areas. He also presented the agreed Workplan 2019-2020.

AG_1_SD_2_Summary_Zagreb.pdf

3. What do policy briefs tell us and how do they influence our work?

The presentations in this session were based on the briefs received and the literature uploaded in the restricted area of the Group. Each presentation was followed by a Questions & Answers session.

The presentation "Brief summary of the social dimension in the EHEA and Bologna with student eyes" was held by the co-chair Robert Napier. Data show disappointing results when it comes to national awareness and strategy-building on the topic of SD in recent years. Different measures can be used to support student access, participation and completion of studies, as well as to face the underrepresentation issue of given groups in the student body and the student retention issues. Information was also provided on the project "Social and international dimension of education and recognition of acquired learning": WP3 will provide funds to support five meetings of the AG, two of which combined with PLAs.

The presentation “Data requirement” was held by the Eurostudent representative, Martin Unger. In addition to aggregated indicators, the need for micro data was emphasised in order to monitor students’ characteristics, study paths, and behaviours. Building up a database of relevant information might take years, nevertheless it appears to be urgent to start micro data collection, in order to have a wide and detailed understanding of the situation. As regards to the carrying out of student surveys, the need to involve social scientists with a wide knowledge of HE systems was underlined, as well as the opportunity of using the know how that Eurostudent has built, including international comparability as an add-on.

The presentation “Link between social dimension and quality assurance in higher education” was held by the co-chair Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt. The link of SD and different policy areas was underlined, leading to the conclusions that SD considerations ought to be embedded in most HE functions, and they should be treated as a continuous process of quality enhancement. Ways through which SD enhancement becomes an integral part of improving overall quality of HE could include: a national strategy or programme aimed at enhancing SD; the embedding of SD into a national quality assurance (QA) model for higher education; HEIs policies, mechanisms and practices aimed at enhancing Social Dimension.

The Q&A sessions focused on a number of issues, including: the need of properly defining sub-groups in the student population; the consideration that SD must not be limited to access issues, but also to student performance and success; the wide range of national rules on data collection/protection, to be dealt with being aware that AG1 cannot solve all problems related to data collection; the importance of the students’ self-disclosure to complement macro/micro data collection; the different implications of links between SD and quality assurance, funding, student recruitment and institutional policies for social inclusion.

AG_1_SD_2_Social_Dimension_EHEA_and_PLAs.pdf

AG_1_SD_2_Data_Collection.pdf

AG_1_SD_2_Link_SD_Quality_Assurance.pdf

4. How do we see the structure of the Principles and Guidelines for the Social Dimension (PAG)?

The presentations showed ideas of the AG1 members on how to structure the Principles and Guidelines for the Social Dimension. The co-chair Robert Napier was the moderator of the Session.

The proposal "Social Dimension in the EHEA. Principles and Guidelines - Input from Luxembourg" was introduced by the representative from Luxembourg, Isabelle Reinhardt, who concentrated on the idea of considering the learners from a holistic point of view in order to assure their full integration into Higher Education. In order to establish a national strategy and/or a national policy in view of an inclusive EHEA, three phases should be taken into consideration: pre-study phase; during-studies phase; post-studies phase. Each phase must lead to a number of principles, while all phases must be based on key common elements, i.e. absence of discrimination, equally accessible support for everyone, and orientation. Main target groups are student and staff (also at secondary education level); student involvement is required at all levels, while training should be made available to teacher and staff to fulfill the principles.

The proposal “Danske Studerendes Fællesråd’s inputs on headlines for social dimension PAGs” was introduced by the representative from Denmark, Julian Lo Curlo. The input from the National Union of Students underlined that the general focus of the PAGs should not be only on access, but also on completion. A national mapping of underrepresented groups is important to this purpose, as countries still have different contexts and different groups may face different challenges. Such a national mapping must also include the groups already agreed in the Yerevan Ministerial Conference (2009). Among others, headlines should include transportation (Education should be equally accessible regardless of where a student lives, e.g. urban or rural areas) and housing (quality standards, but also affordable prices to support the students’ aspiration to being autonomous), as well as gender distribution and student well-being and mental health.

The proposal “Summary of the European Standards and Guidelines framework and value for the Social Dimension PAG” was introduced by the representative from the United Kingdom, John Storan. The statement was to explore the value of using the framework provided by the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) in order to establish the principles and guidelines for social dimension in the EHEA. After describing the main features, the scope and applicability of the ESG framework, the question was raised whether the ESG framework can be used in order to develop a similar tool for the PAGs of SD. Different but related issues should be considered, among them whether the approach of the ESG may fit with the objectives of the AG1. A question was also raised about who the readership of the document to prepare will be, and whether the language of the ESG is appropriate to deal with the SD topics.

In the discussion that followed the presentations, a question was raised about how to get SD have the same relevance in the Bologna Process as other commitments. To this purpose, consensus received the idea that, beyond being a value in itself, SD can be beneficial to both the HE institutions and the countries (government bodies and public agencies). Both should be encouraged to look at the positive aspects of SD policies (including financial benefits, good reputation, positive influence on the national GDP) rather than being prescriptive (e.g. consequences of non-implementation). The case of Croatia was presented as a possible good example: SD standards were incorporated into the accreditation procedures, and performance-based SD indicators were included into the funding agreements, therefore institutions may improve their funding according to the SD activities they perform.

AG_1_SD_2_Proposal_MESR_Luxembourg.pdf

AG_1_SD_2_Proposal_NSU_Denmark.pdf

AG_1_SD_2_Proposal_UK.pdf

5. Workshop on PRINCIPLES for social dimension
Moderators: Ninoslav Scukanec Schmidt, IDE and Robert Napier, ESU

AG_1_SD_2_Workshop_Intro.pdf

Part I: What would be the social dimension principles for the HE system level policy making?

The aim of this part of the workshop was to come up with the list of possible principles for the social dimension that could be implemented at the national HE system level. Ministries and national agencies have different policy levers through which they could foster the social dimension.

Part II: What would be the social dimension principles for HE institutions?

The aim of this workshop was to come up with the list of possible principles for the social dimension that could be implemented by universities.

Conclusions of the workshops

Since there were two parallel groups working on both principles for HE system and for HEIs, the minutes below contain final results produced in Group 1 and Group 2. The below principles serve as a basis of the further work of the Drafting Team who will produce the new version of the principles until the next meeting in Vienna. All members of the AG will approve the next version of the principles at the meeting in Vienna.

Group 1: Workshop Minutes

Social dimension principles for HE SYSTEM:

- Commitment to the social dimension in HE should be evident from its explicit mention in the national strategic goals for HE. Governments shall adopt national action plans for social dimension in HE in order to facilitate operationalization of strategic goals. Action plans shall contain clear national targets and indicators regarding the access, participation in and completion of studies, in particular for vulnerable and under-represented students. There should be appropriate measures in place in order to prevent drop-out of students.
- Governments should introduce standardized and regular procedures for collecting data at national level on the composition of the student body in order to monitor who is accessing, participating in, dropping out and completing HE studies. Governments should identify vulnerable and under-represented groups of students. Governments should implement regular evaluations on the effectiveness and impact of social dimension policies.
- National policies should take into account the need for accurate and reliable information, counselling and guidance about prospects in HE for pre-tertiary students in order to increase their access, participation in and completion of HE studies. Particular attention should be given to vulnerable and under-represented students.
- Social dimension in HE is interconnected with other policy areas in HE. Governments shall support the mainstreaming of social dimension in other policy areas in HE in order to have integrated policies toward social dimension in HE.

Availability and accessibility of student housing, availability of student financial aid for covering transportation costs to and from study location, availability and quality of

health services for solving students' mental problems have impact on social dimension of HE and HE systems should create appropriate measures through which they will provide these services to students in need.

- External quality assurance procedures aim to enhance social dimension in HE.
- Legal regulations should enable sufficient flexibility in study programs organization and delivery, which takes into account the diversity of students. Along with full-time studies, national systems should allow different modes of study, which include part-time studies, on-line studies, and distance learning.
- Governments should work towards improving teacher training (initial and continuous) for working with a diverse student body.

Social dimension principles for HE INSTITUTIONS:

- Commitment of HEI to social dimension should be evident from its explicit mention in the institutional strategy. Other key documents of the HEI also contain clear, unambiguous definitions, objectives, and activities towards enhancing social dimension. Consider developing of a separate institutional policy for social dimension, which would consolidate all mechanisms toward securing that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations.
- HEI continuously strives to widen access and participation, which includes also enabling alternative access routes.
- HEI nurtures a culture that favors diversity and inclusion as an important element of enhancing an overall quality of all HEI's functions (teaching, learning, research, outreach).
- There are standardised procedures in place for collecting data on different characteristics of the student body and HEI implements regular evaluations of the effectiveness and impact of policies and practices regarding social dimension.
- Internal quality assurance procedures aim to enhance social dimension at HEI.
- Study programme organisation and delivery enable sufficient flexibility and comprise different approaches to learning and teaching, which take into account the diversity of students and build a successful working relationship between the faculty and the students.
- Procedures of academic assessment are clear and transparent. Criteria for the final mark are clearly defined and all students are notified in advance. Assessment criteria are just and non-discriminatory. Different modes of assessment and feedback are

used continuously in order to provide students with more than one indicator of how they achieved the planned learning outcomes.

- There are various student services in place (such as legal or psychological counselling centres; career advising centres; offices for students with disabilities; various financial aid programmes, etc.) in accordance with diverse needs of students at particular HEI.
- Institutional policies, procedures, practices and budgets enable and encourage continuous involvement of students in all key aspects of the HEI's work. Students participate in study programme design and delivery processes. Students have insight into how their evaluations are utilised towards improving the quality of work at the HEI. The HEI provides equal opportunity for all students, especially those identified as belonging to vulnerable and under-represented groups.
- The HEI systematically encourages employees to embed social dimension and inclusion in institutional work. Lecturers embed these policies in study programme planning, design, and delivery. There is monitoring and evaluation of individual achievements of employees and their impact on promoting social dimension and social inclusion at the institution. There are institutional awards, recognition, and promotions in place to recognise staff contributions towards fostering social dimension and social inclusion.

Academic staff should have continuous access to information, advice, and professional development programmes on how to improve learning and teaching, how to encourage students to be more proactive, how to ensure their successful progress and completion of studies. HEI's regulations and procedures provide academic and administrative staff with sufficient resources and freedom to respond to the diverse needs of the student body.

- HEI's internationalization efforts and mobility policies take into account needs of vulnerable and under-represented groups of students.

Consider social dimension principles for the European Higher Education Area!

Group 2: Workshop Minutes

Social dimension principles for HE SYSTEM:

- Whilst there has already been commitment to develop National Access Plans, this commitment was not followed up upon. However, it is only through the adoption of a national strategy or plan on social dimension that we can truly have an impact on higher education. We also need to emphasize the need of having a trans-sectoral and

multi-stakeholder approach when developing such strategies or plans, in order to be able to have effective implementation after adoption.

- Each development in the social dimension of higher education needs to be aligned with other policy fields, and ministries responsible for higher education should work hand in hand with other ministries in order to build resilient synergies and thoroughly improve the situation of the social dimension of higher education.
- Governments should ensure that economic reasons do not prevent anyone from studying. Such reasons are not only restricted to tuition fees, but also include ancillary expenses such as transportation, housing, and general living expenses.
- Investing in the social dimension of higher education will intrinsically mean that the state will have societal and economical benefits. Investing in having a more diverse learners' body will place the state at an advantage when it has a more diverse educated population in the future.
- Governments should build policies around a framework that pushes social dimension as a manner of complementing and enhancing the quality of education. This can be achieved by shifting the mindset within the institutions through national policy.
- Data collection is a crucial tool to improve the social dimension of higher education. In this regard, countries need to focus more on collecting data that allows for a timely and detailed monitoring of the social dimension in access, transition and completion of HE.
- Teacher training is the basis for attaining any of these principles, and therefore more investment needs to be made in this regard.

Social dimension principles for HE INSTITUTIONS:

- HEI should have dedicated strategies that will allow the social dimension to improve holistically. Such strategies should delve into the institutions' role in prior education, and how they can influence decisions students make before accessing HE.
- HEI should frequently analyse the workload of study programmes, in order to ensure ECTS justice. Lack of such analysis could automatically lead to exclude certain groups of students from engaging in such programmes of studies, and thus limiting the diversity that could be attained within.
- HEI should ensure that the social dimension serves as a tool to inform, support and guide partnerships with various strategic social partners (such as schools, civil society organisations) and the wider community that the institutions serve.
- HEI should also strive to use accessible and inclusive language at all stages of engaging with students or potential students. This varies from speech used when

giving out information about higher education (such as on websites and leaflets) to that used during lectures.

- Gender balance is still missing in many study paths, but most particularly within the STEM field. HEI need to strive to achieve gender balance across the board, by offering flexible learning paths and teaching forms, as well as by putting in place support mechanisms for special needs of students.
- HEI should strive to have accessible infrastructure, even beyond physical accessibility. With the advancements in research and knowledge, HEI should aim to improve accessibility for all students including those with mental health issues and non-physical disabilities.
- HEI should play a crucial role in monitoring and providing general services for students that are part and parcel of the students' wellbeing and success indicators. This includes personal services such as access to health services and wellbeing services, as well as other services that are crucial for completion to higher education, such as libraries and digital tools that are required during the studies.

6. Drafting Team(s) Composition

The discussion was moderated by both the co-chairs and was aimed at designating the members of the Drafting Team(s) for the PAGs. The option of having two sub-team working on PLAs at the system and the institutional level was discussed; there was agreement that is better to have just one team, in order to avoid repetitions and incoherencies among sections of the document. After the members' expression of interest, it was decided that the Drafting Team will be composed by the two Co-chairs (Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt and Robert Napier), Belgium Flemish Community, EUA, European Commission, Eurostudent, Germany, Luxembourg, UK. The final composition of the Drafting Team was agreed and it consists of the following members:

1. Ronja Hesse
2. Isabelle Reinhardt
3. Henriette Stoeber (in collaboration with Michael Gaebel and Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik. Anna-Lena will replace Henriette in the next meetings of the AG1)
4. Klara Engels-Perenyi
5. John Storan
6. Patrick Willems
7. Martin Unger
8. Robert Napier
9. Ninoslav Scukanec Schmidt

7. Upcoming peer learning activities (PLA)

The moderator was co-chair Robert Napier. He reminded that the approved Project requires PLAs to be linked to the AG meetings and proposed the period September-November 2019

as an appropriate timing. The discussion then focused on identifying possible topics for the PLAs; among others, the involvement of eastern EHEA countries, and the enhancements of cooperation among ministries on specific topics (e.g. housing, transportation) were recommended.

8. AOB

It was confirmed that the next meeting of the Group will take place in Wien on June 5th, hosted by Austria. It was agreed to upload in the restricted area the presentation held in the meeting, waiting for them to be incorporated into the minutes, as expected for those of the Zagreb meeting.

9. Conclusion

The Co-chairs thanked all participants for being present and for actively contributing to the meeting. They also thanked the European Commission for hosting the meeting.