



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE

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Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension

Copenhagen (Denmark), 11 February 2020

Minutes

List of participants

Delegation	First Name	Surname
Austria	Marita	Gasteiger
Belgium Flemish Community	Patrick	Willems
Croatia, Institute for the Development of Education (Co-chair)	Ninoslav	Scukanec Schmidt
ESU (Co-chair)	Robert	Napier
ETUCE	Annette	Dolan
EUA	Anna-Lena	Claeys-Kulik
European Commission	Lucie	Trojanova
Eurostudent	Martin	Unger
Germany	Ronja	Hesse
Lithuania	Andrius	Zalitis
Luxembourg	Isabelle	Reinhardt
Sweden	Robin	Moberg
National Union of Students in Denmark	Julian	Lo Curlo
National Union of Students in Denmark	Sandi	Rizvic
Poland	Monika	Przybysz
Romania	Mihai Cezar	Haj
United Kingdom	John	Storan
BFUG Secretariat	Giovanni	Finocchietti
BFUG Secretariat	Susanna	Taormina

Apologies from: Austrian Student Ombudsman, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Slovenia and United Kingdom (Scotland).



1. Welcome remarks and approval of agenda

The meeting was chaired by Ninoslav S. Schmidt (Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia) and Robert Napier (European Student Union). Participants were welcomed by Julian Lo Curlo (National Students Union of Denmark), who emphasized the significance of hosting the meeting in a place run by students. A tour the table followed, and participants introduced themselves. Co-chairs introduced the Agenda proposing to add a presentation of the Bologna Researcher's Conference as a new topic. Participants agreed and the Agenda was approved.

2. State of Play of PAGs - Update on progress

The Croatian Co-chair offered an overview of the progress made on the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) since the last BFUG Meeting in Helsinki. He reminded that AG1 members had agreed to structure the PAGs as a short policy document with a list of principles, each accompanied by guidelines on how to implement it. Then he gave a short briefing of the AG1 workplan (see presentation) from the beginning until the 4th Meeting in Helsinki (11 November 2019).

From the beginning of its work, the group had decided to use the definition of Social Dimension (SD) as it had been included in the London, Yerevan and Paris Communiqués as its starting point. However, the Group also added new elements to this definition: SD encompasses the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity and diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities. The idea is that SD principles should be integrated into the core missions of higher education. Co-chairs also pointed out that "equity" and "equality" are different concepts, and it is important to stress both in the final PAGs document.

They also reported the main conclusions of the BFUG Meeting in Helsinki, where a new name for the final PAGs document was suggested ("Principles and Guidelines to strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA"). The document has been very well received by the BFUG. It was highlighted that the SD and the PAGs document will have a prominent place in the 2020 Roma Communiqué, being one of the two main priorities (the other being learning and teaching). For the moment, the PAGs document is an annex to the Roma Communiqué draft.

During the BFUG Meeting in Helsinki an effective discussion took place and suggestions for improvement were made by a number of BFUG countries. The draft PAGs was presented also to the BFUG Board meeting in Zagreb, where the document was very well received and further suggestions were received. Most of the suggestions were received and integrated in the document. A new version of the PAGs was developed, defining 10 principles for SD in higher education for the upcoming decade of the Bologna Process 2020-2030, to be discussed during this meeting. A possible time plan was outlined in preparation of the final version of the PAGs, that should be ready by the BFUG Meeting in Kiev.

AG1_SD_5_Overview_progress_AG1_after_Helsinki

3. Presentation on Bologna Process Researchers' Conference - Future of Higher Education

The Romanian representative gave a presentation on the results of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference (Bucharest, 29-21 January 2020). The Conference focused on five main themes, and different papers were presented. The conclusions of the panel debates were summarised, pointing out the achievements as well as the critical points of concern. Among others, it was underlined that: national strategies/actions plans were not developed in many EHEA countries, despite commitments since 2009; data on relevant aspects of the SD is still missing; and refugees' integration is still a big issue for many countries. It appears that the Bologna Process has not brought about greater changes in SD and that for several years SD has been an undefined concept.

A brief discussion took place after the Presentation. It was underlined that a difference should be made between "governments" and "public authorities", that - although it is necessary to be realistic -

it should not be forgotten that social inclusion topic in higher education is becoming more and more important, and that the present situation is not as it was in the past decades.

AG1_SD_5_Bologna_Process_Researchers_Conference

4. Further development and finalisation of PAGs - Part 1

The first part of the discussion focused on the Introduction of the document. Each paragraph of the Introduction was discussed, and revisions were agreed upon. The issue was raised that the document mentions three groups of students (underrepresented, disadvantaged, vulnerable) and it is important to agree on the related definitions. The Eurostudent representative provided input on the definitions/explanations of these concepts. Members agreed on mentioning these three groups in the introductory part, with a footnote redirecting to a “glossary” to the PAGs, based on definitions in the shape of short sentences as working definitions, without referring to any country’s usage nor referring to them as legal definitions at European level. This may help countries to clarify their own definitions and encourage discussions beyond the simply legal aspects. Members agreed upon developing definitions for the purpose of the AG1 work, making them short and concise. Eurostudent was asked to lead the preparation of the glossary; ETUCE, Germany, Romania and UK volunteered to contribute to the preparation; 18 February 2020 was agreed as a deadline for the task.

The discussion then moved to the rest of the document. Principles and related guidelines were analysed and commented upon; different points of view and a number of significant contributions both concerning the wording and the contents were considered. The agreed outcomes of the discussion have been incorporated in real time into the text of the draft document. The outcome of the exercise will be an improved version of the document, which the co-chairs will finalise and send to the whole Group, so that members will have a further chance to improve it.

Beyond decisions on punctual aspects of the text, also in response to the suggestions and proposals made by the BFUG and individual countries, some general issues were agreed upon to be applied to the whole document. It was decided to use the expressions "public authorities" instead of "governments", and "higher education institutions" (HEIs) instead of "universities". The expression "the BFUG believes" will be changed into "we, the ministers, believe". The statement of each principle will be shortened, highlighting the most significant part with a first and main sentence in bold and one-two added sentences; each principle will be followed by two or three guidelines. Finally, it was decided that at least two native proofreaders will revise the final text of the document.

5. Reflecting on the role of Social Dimension in Draft Ministerial Communiqué, and looking beyond 2020

The ESU Co-Chair introduced the issue and explained that the Draft Communiqué was made available just before the last BFUG Board Meeting in Zagreb. It is foreseen that the PAGs should remain an annex to the Ministerial Communiqué: thus, ministers will directly commit to implement the content of the PAGs.

The Draft Communiqué includes a number of references to the SD issues. A first reference is made when the “community engagement” is mentioned, meaning that the whole community is engaged with this topic and HEIs engage with their wider communities (societies, third mission, etc.). A second reference is made in the “our vision” section, where “a connected, inclusive and innovative EHEA is mentioned”. Possibly, the Communiqué will also include a reference to the commitment of the Ministers to the PAGs document that will be in the Appendix.

In the following discussion, it was pointed out that a step forward in terms of SD for the next three years is missing in the Draft Communiqué, and a discussion took place on how SD and the work of AG1 can be thought for the next years. It was pointed out that there should be more instruments to monitor countries’ performances on this topic. Benchmarks and ad hoc indicators might support this target, although many countries still significantly lack data and information. A minimum list of data and indicators should be required for each country. The idea of a thematic peer group (TPG) on SD

was also discussed, which could support countries in their process of implementing SD principles; it was underlined, as emphasised also by the BFUG, that it might take some time to establish and organise such a group.

A further suggestion was to organise an event on SD after the Rome Ministerial Conference, to support joint discussions on the Principles of the PAGs, as well as to give member countries a chance to present their progress in terms of SD. The suggested timing for the event was 1,5 years after Rome 2020 Conference. Representatives from HEIs and students should be involved, in order to go beyond discussions only among Ministries. The Conference may be combined with other measures, such as a TPG, monitoring activities, etc. It was also suggested that an organisation at European level could be set up in order to support countries and institutions in implementing SD principles and developing SD policies. However, it was pointed out that organisations of this kind already exist and have not been very successful. Since information and data are still lacking from many countries, it is important to focus on collecting at least a minimum set of indicators and generate a common understanding on data collection.

Co-Chairs welcomed these suggestions, which will be included in the final report of the AG1. They will present them in the discussion that will take place in the next BFUG Meeting on the workplan for the period 2020 - 2023.

6. PLAs on Social Dimension - Feedback on work of AG, Meeting conclusions & AOB

The ESU Co-chair gave an overview of the PLA on SD that will be held within the SIDERAL Project. Few applications have been received, due to concurrent activities as well as to budget restrictions. The idea is to merge the budgets originally thought for two PLAs and reduce the activities to only one PLA taking place in May. The remaining funds might be used for purposes related to the activity (e.g. to reimburse participants). The PLA should take place on the 20-22 May 2020. The confirmation of the PLA and more details on reopening of the registrations should be sent soon, in order to have dates and participants confirmed as soon as possible. The topic of the PLA will remain unchanged, but it was suggested that the issue of data collection could be integrated into the agenda.

Co-Chairs then confirmed once again the method of AG1 work until the Ministerial Conference in Rome, as the official mandate of the group is valid until the Ministerial Conference. The Co-Chairs proposed that the group maintains an online coordination, so that changes in the PAGs document can be made as it was agreed. A time plan for the near future was agreed:

- by 18 February 2020 a draft Glossary to the PAGS will be released;
- by 25 February 2020 an improved version of the PAGs - including also the Glossary - will be prepared by Co-Chairs, based on the inputs by the BFUG and comments by the Group members;
- after 25 February 2020, a new round of consultations will be launched among members;
- the improved version will be sent to the BFUG, to be discussed during the Meeting in Kyiv (4 -5 March 2020); comments and suggestions will be sent by BFUG members after the Meeting;
- by 9 March 2020 the consultations of AG1 members and the collection of feedback by BFUG members will be closed;
- by 27 March 2020 the Co-Chairs will work on a new version of the document, incorporating all the inputs and feedbacks received; the new - and potentially final - version of the PAGs should be ready for the BFUG Board (Lviv, 2 April 2020).

Before closing the meeting, the Co-Chairs thanked once again the National Union of Students in Denmark for hosting the meeting. They also thanked the participants for a very active contribution to the discussions.