

ADVISORY GROUP 1: INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Progress Report November 2016

Advisory Group 1 on International Co-operation was set up and tasked by the Ministerial meeting at Yerevan to come up with proposals for enhancing a more 'outward looking' EHEA. This is an important but highly challenging remit at a time when Higher Education, while culturally still nationally rooted is also increasingly transnational and globalised. It is important that the proposals of the group help to enhance existing activity rather than duplicating the work of a myriad of cross-national projects, associations and networks. AG1 has risen to this challenge by ensuring a good representation of European and international bodies on the Group (International Association of Universities, European Association of International Educators, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, Union for the Mediterranean) and through effecting a growing dialogue with other regional HE groupings such as ASEAN, the African Union, and the Organisation of Ibero-American States. It also has worked closely with both Working Group 2 on Implementation and Working Group 3 on New Goals since both these Working Groups have an international dimension. The co-chairs have given a priority to this transversal role by attending the co-chairs meetings and ensuring that our agenda resonates with the work of all the other groups. ESU has been an important voice in all our discussions.

AG1 has met three times in Paris (January 2016), London (May 2016) and Nizhny Novgorod (October 2016). It will meet in January 2017 in Madrid and there will be a final meeting before summer 2017. The first two meetings debated whether the Group should focus primarily on the mechanisms for successful inter-regional dialogues or on trends (such as digitalisation) or on common issues such as quality assurance or inclusivity in HE. Discussions at these meetings helped to shape the guiding principles of the 'need to listen to and learn from the world' as well as to engage collaboratively on common problems. The first two meetings also clarified that although policy learning and policy transfer take place through cross-national partnerships, funded programmes, European or international professional bodies, staff and student mobility there is still an important role for the EHEA to play as a value driven network, a beacon of good practice and a framework for common policy dialogue.

The third meeting in Nizhni Novgorod was highly productive and led to a clearer understanding of both the potential and limitations of cross national and inter-regional collaborations from presentations from ASEAN, Russia, UNESCO and AUF. The group agreed that in order to further the goal of the BPF to 'enhance international cooperation between regional higher education areas and systems' a proposal should be put forward to the BFUG to create a form of associated membership for non-EHEA members in order to establish joint goals and progress collaboration on tools, areas of common interest and addressing global challenges. The details of this vehicle would need to be agreed but could develop from an inter-regional dialogue to an 'international alliance of regional higher education systems or areas'. The AG1 meeting to be held in Madrid has already attracted representatives from Latin America, Africa and the Mediterranean which will give us an opportunity about testing the feasibility of the new proposal with Regional Groupings. This suggestion of associate or linked membership could be an attraction for Ministers from non-EHEA countries to attend the Paris Ministerial in 2018 and a useful framework for furthering the development of common action on joint challenges to Higher Education. The Group discussed different options for the format and the programme of the meeting and a proposal should be ready for the next BFUG in May in Malta.