Working Group 2 Implementation (Brussels, 27th January 2016)

The proper implementation of the agreed key commitments is needed in order to achieve an EHEA where:

- Our common goals are implemented in all countries to ensure trust in each other's higher education system;
- Automatic recognition of qualifications has become a reality so that students and graduates can move easily throughout it;
- Higher education is contributing effectively to build inclusive societies, founded on democratic values and human rights;
- Educational opportunities (of high qualiy) provide the competences and skills required for European (world) citizenship, innovation and employment.

First Meeting of the Implementation Working Group (27th of January 2016, Brussels)

Outline of the brainstorming session no. 1:

Recognition, Social dimension, Lifelong learning, Mobility

Facilitators and/or rapporteurs:

- Helga Posset (Austria)
- Noël Vercruysse (Belgium FL)

The main purpose of the brainstorming session will be to identify the most important issues which should be covered with the WG activities as regards the following areas:
- ➢ Social dimension
- ➢ Recognition
- ➢ Lifelong learning
- ➢ Mobility
The issue of employability which is a transversal issue should be dealt with either.

Participants should try to answer the following questions:
1) What are the concrete issues in the implementations which should be fostered so the European Higher Education Area becomes a solid infrastructure for transparency and recognition?
2) How can we tackle these issues?
3) How can we involve national stakeholders?

Commitments in the Yerevan Communiqué:

Recognition

- to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, reporting to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016, and asking the Convention Committee, in cooperation with the ENIC and NARIC Networks, to prepare an analysis of the reports by the end of 2017, taking due account of the monitoring of the Convention carried out by the Convention Committee;

- to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are automatically recognized at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications;

- to remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programmes and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning, as well as encouraging higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning;

Mobility

- to promote staff mobility taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalization

- to promote the portability of grants and loans taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalization

Social dimension

- to make our higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy

An **EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition** would be composed of the following core elements, which make up its underlying academic infrastructure connecting:

1. A common understanding of the purposes of higher education (cf. part II.1).

2. Qualifications

   a. A common European qualifications framework for higher education
   b. The part of national qualifications framework covering higher education self-certified against the QF-EHEA and, as appropriate, also referenced against the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning
   c. Subject specific learning outcomes for qualifications included in the national qualifications framework
   d. The higher education institutions have designed appropriate curricula giving due considerations to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders and embedding employability, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, democratic citizenship
   e. Program specifications (a program is an approved curriculum constructed of individual modules or units and include at least the following items):
   - The units or modules
   - ECTS: work load expressed in credits
   - The modes of delivery: i.a. contact hours, full time/part time education, distance education, blended learning, e-learning, work based learning
   - The assessment methods that enable the achievement of the learning outcomes to be demonstrated
   - Language(s) of instruction
   - Student learning support and facilities
   - Equal opportunities for disabled students
   - Opportunities for mobility and/or work placements
   - The profile of the program: more professionally oriented or more academically oriented
   - Information about the employability of the graduates in particular the situation of the graduates on the labor market and their professional career based on a tracking systems of graduates
   - Information about the rights associated to the qualification in particular in terms of access to regulated professions
   - Opportunities for recognition of prior learning
   f. The Diploma Supplement issued upon graduation

3. Quality assurance

   a. A common European model for quality assurance of higher education: the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
   b. A national system for quality assurance of higher education in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area ensuring that the standards are met in the qualifications awarded.

4. Recognition

a. A common European framework for recognition of prior formal and non-formal and informal learning based on the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and compatible with the Recommendation by the Council of the European Union on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 20 December 2014.

b. A national regulatory framework for recognition of prior formal and non-formal and informal learning ensuring a fair and equal treatment of every application (full implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and in particular easy access to the system, timely decisions, a minimal administrative burden) and ensuring easy acceptance of all qualifications awarded in the EHEA provided that the structural reforms have been implemented properly.

Furthermore we need a common understanding of learning outcomes:

- ➢ Knowledge and understanding
- ➢ Generic competences
- ➢ Subject specific competences
- ➢ Indication of level

The European infrastructure for transparency and recognition as described in the previous paragraphs will enhance our understanding of the diversity of higher education systems, higher education institutions and programs.

The European infrastructure for transparency and recognition is also essential to developing the social dimension of higher education in practice: the social dimension understood as including all provisions needed to have equitable access into, progress in, and completion of higher education.
Goals like the social dimension and employability can only be reached if they are set in the perspective of lifelong learning. The concept of lifelong learning is a broad one where learning takes place through an education that is diverse, flexible and available at different times and places and that is pursued throughout the life course.

All national regulatory frameworks implementing the structural reforms of the EHEA should provide a space for easily developing joint study programs and joint degrees.

From the Implementation report:

Conclusions with regard LLL

Lifelong Learning continues to be a challenging concept and one which needs to be broken down into different elements in order to compare realities across countries. Although recent years have seen dramatic economic and social changes to the higher education landscape and have accentuated the need to develop lifelong learning provision, evidence of major structural changes or national action to respond to such challenges is difficult to find. More commonly, institutions are adapting existing provision to meet new and developing needs.

Lifelong learning is a recognised mission in all higher institutions in most of the EHEA countries. Moreover, higher education institutions have a well-established flexible course provision in many countries, offering various types of distance- and e-learning, in addition to part-time studies. Even though not all countries have an official part-time status for higher education students, students may have *de facto* part-time status while theoretically studying full time.

Financing of lifelong learning is fragmented, but the majority of funding in many countries comes from the general public education budget, with additional funding from private contributions from students and businesses. In most countries part-time students do not make higher contributions to the cost of their education than full-time students, although in eight countries they do. Moreover, the financial support for part-time students is in some countries more limited than for their full-time counterparts.

Indeed the two issues are often related as in some countries where part-time students need to make higher financial contributions; the support they receive is lower or does not exist. Hence, in these countries there are no financial incentives to study part-time, so students wishing to study more flexibly may find it difficult to do so.

The concept of lifelong learning is rarely well defined in operational terms in EHEA countries, and where definitions exist, they are in many cases rather vague and they vary across countries. Therefore, it is important to take into account the limitations of lifelong learning as a concept through which the demands of 'new learners' are examined. Adults, or mature students, are often considered as learners whose needs often demand specific solutions when designing study paths. When analysing the challenges of new learners, more emphasis could be placed on how education systems deal with the needs of adult learners, while at the same time taking into account the lifelong learning framework.

Conclusions with regard the Social dimension

Drawing upon statistical data, the results of the BFUG questionnaire and the latest Eurostudent report, this chapter has focused on the social dimension of the Bologna Process and its goal that the student body should reflect the diversity of the populations and that the background of students should not have an impact on their participation in and attainment of higher education.

While some progress can be noted, the analysis clearly shows that the goal of providing equal opportunities to quality higher education is far from being reached.

With regard to gender, some imbalances have reduced over time but nevertheless continue to exist in most countries and across the EHEA as a whole. Women are overrepresented in the total student population and in new entrants in nearly all countries.

At the level of doctoral education the picture is mixed: in four countries the shares of men and women entering doctoral education are more or less equal; in 12 countries men are underrepresented, in countries women are underrepresented. The shares of women entering doctoral education vary from 41 % in Turkey to 60 % in Iceland.

The greatest gender imbalances exist, however, between different fields of study. In some fields, such as teacher training or social services, men are strongly underrepresented. In other fields, such

as computing or engineering, women are strongly underrepresented. Policies aimed at achieving gender balance in higher education are therefore likely to be most effective if they take study-field-specific imbalances into account.

Another central concern of the social dimension is whether immigrants and children of immigrants have the same chances to participate in and attain higher education as native students. Such information is, however, much more difficult to gather, which is why the present chapter uses data on foreign-born students as proxy. This data shows very clearly that in nearly all countries, an immigration background is negatively associated with higher education attainment. Foreign-born young adults are more likely to quit education and training at an early stage and less likely to participate in tertiary education than their native-born counterparts.

Similarly, the educational background of parents continues to have an impact on tertiary education attainment. In all EHEA countries for which data is available, children of medium educated parents have much lower chances to attain tertiary education than children of highly educated parents. Being aware of those (and other) imbalances, almost all higher education systems reflect the objective of widening participation in their higher education policy and more than 70 % of the systems claim to do so through a set of concrete measures.

Despite the commitment in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué of 2009 to set 'measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the [...] decade' (20), less than 20 % of the systems have defined quantitative objectives with a reference to underrepresented groups. More common are targets for increasing overall participation – 30 of the 48 systems for which data is available have at least one such target, in most cases related to the European Union's Europe 2020 strategy and its target that by 2020 at least 40 % of young people (aged 30-34) should have completed tertiary or equivalent education. However, whether increasing overall participation will also result in a more balanced composition of the student body remains to be seen.

In more than 90 % of the higher education systems in the EHEA the composition of the student body is subject to some kind of systematic monitoring. In many cases, however, the monitoring covers only a limited number of characteristics, such as age, gender and type and level of qualification achieved prior to entry to higher education. Other characteristics, such as disability, migrant status or labour market status prior to entry to higher education, are monitored to a much lesser degree.

To be able to identify underrepresented groups and to assess whether measures to widen participation in higher education have the desired effect, it may be advisable for the monitoring of the composition of the student body to take into account a wider range of characteristics related to the social dimension goal and also to establish a closer link between monitoring and policy-making.

As far as alternative access to higher education is concerned, the overall picture across the EHEA looks very similar to the situation described in the previous implementation report. In 22 higher education systems (most of them in Western Europe) at least one such alternative route to higher education exists, while in the remaining 25 systems for which data is available access to higher education still depends on the possession of an upper secondary school leaving certificate (general or vocational).

Concerning the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning some progress can be noted but still a lot of work remains to be done, with regard to policies, procedures, implementation and monitoring. Currently, there is hardly any data on how many students / candidates are actually participating in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and are exempted from some or all higher education programme requirements. The same goes for access via alternative routes more generally.

Academic and/or career guidance services are commonly provided by higher education institutions in all 48 higher education systems for which data is available. In two-thirds of the systems, higher education institutions provide psychological guidance services as well. Special services for students with disabilities also exist in a number of cases. In all systems for which information is available, support services are not only offered to enrolled students but also to prospective students. While this wide-spread existence of student services is certainly a positive development, the available data

does not allow the quality and effectiveness of the services provided to be assessed, nor the extent to which services are accessible to all students.

Fees and financial support systems have been relatively stable within the EHEA, with no major changes in the general direction of approaches, the share of household contributions or public expenditure on student support. Fees (tuition and administrative fees combined) are widespread, with only seven education systems not levying any student contributions. Yet, there is a large variation

between higher education systems regarding the proportion of students paying fees (from nearly no one to everyone) as well as the amount of fees they need to pay (from nearly zero to more than 100 % of the GDP per capita). Countries also rely on different combinations of forms of student support, and the proportion of students receiving such support also varies widely. In general, first cycle students tend to receive more public support than students studying in the second cycle. In the third cycle, as a result of different statuses of doctoral candidates in EHEA countries, fees and support systems are even more diverse.

Conclusions with regard mobility

EHEA countries present very different situations with regard to internationalisation and mobility, especially when looking at their individual mobility flows and the level of engagement in internationalisation activities.

Most countries encourage the internationalisation of higher education through their steering documents. However, more than half of them lack a national internationalisation strategy and provision of guidance for the various stakeholders involved in the internationalisation process. Higher education institutions in many countries also lack a comprehensive internationalisation strategy, although they are increasingly engaged in internationalisation activities such as joint programmes/degrees, MOOCs and cross-border cooperation in research. Many countries have not adopted national quantitative targets for different forms of mobility.

There is no doubt that the trend for internationalisation is growing, and that this offers great potential for higher education institutions in the EHEA. However, lack of funding as well as inflexible national legal frameworks may hinder development in some countries.

Student mobility rates show slight increases since the 2012 report, but still only a minority of students benefit from such experience and underrepresented groups would need greater attention. There is considerable evidence of significant national actions to strengthen mobility, but monitoring, which would allow the assessment of these measures, is lacking in most countries.

Both the incoming and the outward degree mobility rates within the EHEA are below 5 % for the vast majority of countries with available data. When looking at degree mobility flows with non-EHEA countries (Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the United States), it appears that students from outside the EHEA make up more than 5 % of the total student population in only four countries, while in many this proportion is less than 1 %. Overall, the average rate of incoming degree mobile students (from EHEA and non-EHEA countries) is relatively low, reaching 4.4 % of total enrolments. This is a very small increase from 4% in 2008/09. The rate of outward mobility (students undertaking a degree in a non-EHEA country) is extremely low, the weighted average of the EHEA countries reaching only 0.33 %, a figure that has not change since 2008/09.

The concept of 'balanced' mobility is increasingly discussed, yet hardly any country can claim to have genuinely balanced degree mobility. Even when flows reach similar numbers, the countries of origin/destination differ significantly.

It is not possible at the moment to report accurately on whether the EHEA collective target of 20 % mobility by 2020 can be reached or not, as comprehensive and harmonised data collection is not yet fully in place – particularly for credit mobility.

Funding is perceived by ministries and students alike as the biggest obstacle to increased mobility. The portability of financial student support is clearly one important measure to address this concern, but only a minority of countries currently ensure full portability for their students.

Data limitations pose even more significant challenges in evaluating the current situation for staff

mobility. There is no agreed operational definition of staff mobility, which would be necessary to be able to set proper quantitative targets and collect data on participation rates. 'Staff' is not a homogenous group, and it would be important to distinguish obstacles to mobility by type of staff mobility in the future.

For both student and staff mobility, it will be essential to focus not only on numbers, but also on the quality of mobility. This implies investing in information services, monitoring experience, ensuring that recognition and evaluation processes operate fairly, and making changes in light of experience. Improved monitoring of the impact of measures taken to remove obstacles to mobility will also be crucial if optimal mobility flows are to be achieved.

From the report of the structural reforms working group:

Recognition

At their 2015 meeting, *Ministers* should commit to reviewing their national legislation with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, taking due account of the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention by the Convention Committee, and report to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016. The Convention Committee could, in cooperation with ENIC and NARIC Networks be asked to prepare an analysis of the reports by the end of 2017.

Higher education institutions should make adequate use of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual in their own work on recognition. They should review their own institutional procedures with a view to affording applicants adequate opportunities to appeal against recognition decisions made by the institution and include the principle of fair recognition in their codes of ethical behavior.

Recognition of prior learning

Public authorities should
OØ Review current legislation with a view to removing any remaining obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning;
OØ Review their national qualifications frameworks with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;
OØ Encourage higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning.

Higher education institutions should:
OØ Develop a coordinated approach to the recognition of prior learning, if and where such an approach has not yet been adopted;
OØ Further commit to the recognition of prior learning by developing institutional policies and guidelines;
OØ Develop and design flexible curricula that provide and take account of opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and that allow flexible learning paths with flexible modes of entry, progression and delivery;
OØ Ensure that possibilities for the recognition of prior learning are included in the development and design of curricula, study programs, and flexible learning paths.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should systematically collect data on the practice of RPL by higher education institutions to improve the visibility of these processes and to inform further policy development at national and European levels.
Employers and higher education institutions, with the support of public authorities as appropriate, should develop policies and practice for work based learning that provide sufficient grounds, *inter alia* through the clear definition and attestation of learning outcomes, for the recognition of work based learning not a part of formal education for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and awarding qualifications.
The *ENIC and NARIC Networks and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should develop proposals for coherent policy and practice for the recognition of prior learning throughout the EHEA,

taking due account of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012. The *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should consider whether a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by the Committee by 2019.

From the Mobility and internationalization report:

Staff Mobility

The M&I WG recognizes that the role of "staff" is not yet sufficiently investigated when it comes to the Mobility Strategy and there is a need for clear definition of staff mobility. Thus, the guidelines include a clear definition of "staff" and an analysis of current barriers to staff mobility, as well as a set of potential measures to overcome them.

The M&I WG has concerns on legal barriers for short-term and long-term mobility (e.g. strict immigration rules) in the EHEA. Moreover, while family members of researchers should have access to the labour market in the host country, the host institution should provide linguistic and intercultural support for incoming mobile staff. Hence, the quality of the support provided to mobile staff and researchers should be improved through trainings (e.g. linguistic trainings).

The M&I WG acknowledges the following important points:

Ø Permanent mobility, including changing of the employer can be counted as "mobility";

Ø It is unrealistic to have a European benchmark on "staff mobility" (however benchmarks could be defined for its sub-categories such as the academic mobility);

Ø High importance should be given to cross-border and physical mobility as one of the main focus areas;

Ø The teaching and learning mobility should not be separated, as both are aimed at circulation of knowledge;

Ø HEIs have an important role to play in incentivising and monitoring staff mobility, and should do so in a way that is fit-for-purpose and in line with their own international objectives.

The definition of staff mobility should be as follows: "Staff mobility comprises all groups of staff - academic, administrative and technical staff - that is mobile either between higher education institutions or between a higher education institution and a research institution, an enterprise or another organisation. The mobility may take place on a temporary basis, i.e. with an intended return to the home institution or for an indefinite period, i.e. including a change of employer".

Last but not least, it should be underlined that the "Recommendations to enhance staff mobility in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)" focus on how to promote and encourage staff mobility and its quality such as creating a supporting environment for staff mobility and encouraging and supporting staff mobility and its appreciation.

The Portability of Grants and Loans

During its meetings the M&I WG agreed to re-title the work on the portability of grants and loans to "Portability of financial student support", thereby avoiding the distinction between grants, loans and scholarships. In addition, different socio-economic starting points of the EHEA countries were considered. Furthermore, the situation in non-EU as well as EU countries should be appropriately covered.

e The research done by the M&I WG showed that some Eastern European countries haven't adopted the portability of grants and loans for fear of brain drain. However, the advantage of such a system should be demonstrated to all the member countries. Mainly, portability might seem expensive in the short term, but usually countries benefit on the return of qualified specialists. Moreover, while some EHEA countries didn't provide any information on portability of grants and loans (e.g. Russia, Ukraine), others do not offer portable grants but instead mobility support schemes. In some EHEA countries the accommodation support is not yet portable.

The guidelines aim at a fair balance of financial support between the home and host countries. Thus, the home country should in principle cover the living costs of the student and the host country should finance the study courses. If the funding of home country is not enough to cover living expenses, the host country could compliment it up to the real costs. Bearing in mind the above mentioned, the financial support should not be granted twice for the same cause within the EHEA.

Quality in Mobility

The European Quality Charter for Mobility was used as basis for the discussion of the respective issue because many of its proposals have not been properly implemented and heeded. The WG agreed to create a non-exhaustive list of good practice examples on the basis of recommendations included in the Charter to generate a few specific cases of quality mobility and how those cases are defined and implemented on institutional level. The representatives of DAAD, CoE and EC volunteered to follow this initiative.

The M&I WG arises the following important points to be addressed to responsible bodies:

Ø There is a need to differentiate between the quality of mobility proper and the academic quality of the programs and/or institution, whereby the latter is secured through the established quality assurance mechanisms. That said, the role that mobility plays in quality assurance (what elements are considered) should indeed be discussed;

Ø Ensuring the quality of the mobility experience should address the full life-cycle of mobility, from promoting and preparing it, to monitoring academic quality, to ensuring student services, to general evaluation of students and staff participating;

Ø Incoming students and teachers play an important role in internationalisation at home;

Ø A tool for monitoring the quality of partnership between HEIs could be created;

Ø The institutions should internationalize more, to improve students' soft skills and to increase their employability through the acquisition of intercultural competences;

Ø Evaluations of the mobility experience should be public.

Mobility can be divided into three stages: pre-mobility, the actual mobility period and post-mobility stage. The overall quality of a mobility activity is determined by the quality of the services offered along these stages, as well as, naturally, by the quality of the study and research programs, internships, etc. and the quality of the teachers. During the pre-mobility stage students, professors or researchers should have access to information on hosting institution and the learning plan. The linguistic, intercultural and other necessary preparatory measures, such as finance must take place at this stage.

At the second stage of mobility the provision of logistic support is essential. Thus, not only the host institution should take care of the person being mobile, but the sending institution itself should keep contact with student or staff in order to ensure proper mentoring. After the mobility experience there are several relevant issues to be considered, among them recognition, reintegration into the study, research and the study or work environment at home. It is also important to commit people to share their mobility experience with those who are going to become mobile and also those who may not have a chance to embark on an international experience ("internationalization at home"). Mobility must be structured, well prepared and quality assured. The learning plan, being a responsibility of the academic coordinator as well as the student, should be automatically recognised once all learning activities in the host institution are agreed. A learning path that fits the personal needs of students or staff should be set up. Moreover, relevant mobility information should be included in the Diploma Supplement.

There is a wealth of good practice at institutional level regarding how quality of mobility can be defined and improved. The document drafted by the M&I WG simply summarizes some of these practices and attempts to raise political attention to the issue.

Teacher Student's Mobility

The issue of teacher student's mobility was discussed with teacher students. High importance should be given to teachers as multipliers and motivators for their students to understand the advantages of intercultural competences, which can only be acquired by personal experience. Fair and transparent recognition (proper credit transfer) is still a problem, and curricula are generally too restricted. The new ERASMUS+ programme can be important in facilitating more work and study related stays abroad.

The international mobility of teacher-training students should be improved. The further goal of the work accomplished by the M&I WG should be the enhancement of the international dimension of teacher-training and support the mobility of teacher-training students, with the aim of proposing resolutions for the Yerevan Communiqué on how to particularly target the mobility of teacher training students.

While the mobility of teacher training students carries a great potential for future generations of pupils and students, they belong to the least mobile groups. The idea of the paper is to recommend and promote the mobility of all teacher-training students.

However, teacher training students and prospective language teachers in particular should be clearly distinguished. Teachers of the native language for foreigners should have experience of study in the country of the language taught. It is important to encourage HEIs to recognize school work internships related to the teaching subject that were completed abroad in the framework of the study exchange programme. Development of international faculties in HEIs should be encouraged.

The final text proposes actions for teacher training students in general as well as for prospective language teachers, including mobility windows, fair and transparent recognition procedures, and joint programmes.

Mobility of underrepresented groups and balance of mobility flows

M&I WG acknowledges that a lot of talent is lost in higher education because many students from underrepresented groups find it difficult to become mobile. A study on the access to mobility of underrepresented student groups and on imbalanced mobility in Europe was analysed by the WG. According to the results of the analysis the WG members recognized the importance to come up with recommendations for underrepresented groups on how to

gain more access to mobility and to raise the awareness of this situation in the academic community. Moreover, in terms of imbalanced mobility the WG members shared experiences and learned more on the present situation.

There are three underrepresented groups in mobility identified on the basis of existing and latest European data: students with a low parental educational background, students with delayed transition into higher education (later than 2 years after completing secondary education), and older students.

The WG acknowledges the necessity for providing better data and the main obstacles for underrepresented groups to be addressed. Other categories of underrepresented student groups should also be considered, in addition to the ones identified in the study, namely second-chance students, handicapped students, students with a migrant background, etc.

The responsible authorities should acknowledge that:

Ø It is desirable that (information on) mobility is already offered in secondary education;

Ø Visa issues at times hinder mobility for underrepresented groups with migrant background;

Ø More financial support is needed to increase the mobility of underrepresented groups.

The mobility of underrepresented groups should be considered as an added value. Thus, the WG recommends further research on the main obstacles of mobility of underrepresented groups and to develop a mobility strategy for those groups. Meanwhile, different countries should make up their own policies, depending on which groups of underrepresented students they are primordially dealing with. Further relevant data on the national and European level are necessary to be able to better identify the student groups underrepresented in mobility as well as the actions and means to satisfy their needs.

From the Social Dimension working group report:

Access

TG on Access, composed of the SD&LLL WG's representative of Austria, ESU and PL4SD, was set up to single out initiatives to improve access to quality higher education for underrepresented groups through examining, in particular, the results of the PL4SD project and Expanding Opportunities (ExpandO) project16 with the overarching aim to develop guidelines for national access plans/strategies.

The 2012 Bologna Process Implementation Report17, initial results of the PL4SD, ExpandO, and the discussions held at the SD&LLL WG meetings came to evidence that nearly all the EHEA countries are engaged in the improvement of the social dimension of higher education. Across the EHEA there are various mechanisms to financially support students in need, be it in the form of a grant system, support for the families of students, reduction of fees or indirect support through subsidising student canteens, dormitories, transport or health costs. Moreover, all member countries have policies of antidiscrimination and special regulations for underprivileged groups, e.g. students with disabilities. Student counselling and career guidance are also well established in the majority of higher education systems in the EHEA.

However, it became evident that very few member countries had integrated all their measures into a coherent strategy, which would rely from one side upon a systematic approach of identifying barriers into and within the higher education system and from the other side upon relevant data providing evidence for action.

In this light, a set of guidelines were developed to accompany "Widening Participation for Equity and Growth - A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the EHEA to 2020". The aim of the guidelines is to assist countries to meet the challenge of developing or enhancing national plans or strategies. These guidelines were developed to provide a "roadmap" for member countries in order to ensure that national plans or strategies are developed using a systematic approach to identifying barriers into and within the higher education system, based on relevant data providing evidence for action.

Teaching and learning

TG on Teaching and Learning (T&L), composed of the WG representatives of Lithuania, Norway, EI, ESU, and EUA, aimed at producing recommendations on T&L, in particular, how T&L can improve completion rates of underrepresented groups and the quality of higher education in general, how it can support mature and/or returning students. Last but not least, the TG looked at the issue of a more supportive environment for teaching staff.

The TG first turned to the mission of education, including higher education, as a human right and a public good, which should be provided for all on the highest possible level, based on intellectual capacity and not on the ability to pay18. HE should enable graduates to be active and critical members of society and actively participate in the development of modern democracies. In a nutshell, the purpose of education is by no means teaching the students what to think but teaching them how to think and how to respond to the ever-changing needs of the labour market.

The TG recognised that the learning process itself is the interaction between qualified teachers and motivated, engaged students in the classrooms – whether they are physically on a campus or virtual.

In addition, attractive study and teaching conditions were deemed vital for a positive learning process. In a NESET report19 from 2013 students from underrepresented backgrounds where highlighted as being at the greatest risk of dropout, especially students from a lower socioeconomic background. While teaching and learning in general and a student centered learning specifically was highlighted as the key for lessening the risk of dropout.

Teaching and learning activities have as such not been a historical focus of the of the EHEA, however this is changing due to the increased focus on these issues such as in the new proposal for the European Standards and Guidelines as well as the new ECTS users guide. With the increased support for the concept of student centered learning in the structural tools it will be important to follow the implementation to ensure that teaching and learning reforms also benefit the Social Dimension.

Members of the TG would urge the BFUG to consider a general recommendation on teaching and learning both from a structural and social dimension perspective be adopted in the Yerevan communiqué that reflects the increased commitment to teaching and learning reforms. To ensure that success of such an aim, members of the TG recommend countries to support improved learning environments and training for teaching staff. Members of the TG also recommend that teaching and learning reforms be monitored more closely in connection with dropout rates to ensure the impact of subsequent reforms. The successful approaches could be highlighted in the PL4SD database.

Student Support and Services

SD&LLL WG representatives of Armenia, Croatia, Germany, and ESU formed the TG on Student Supports and Services. The TG pointed at the crucial role of student support services or social infrastructure – allocation of financial aid, student housing, dining, and counselling services in the social, psychological and career/training fields – for the success of students in higher education. Given the complexity of social infrastructure, the TG aimed to provide recommendations at different levels, which would be suitable for all systems in the EHEA. For this purpose four topic areas were identified: providing guidance/counselling and networking opportunities for future employment; developing and implementing support structure for underrepresented groups; exploring and creating adequate support mechanisms for mature students; and conducting more focused research on the importance of social infrastructure based on regularly and systematically collected data.

It was acknowledged that a stronger cooperation towards a more inclusive and student-needs-based social infrastructure was indispensable and there was an urgent need to develop a concept of how the social infrastructure could be fostered at the EHEA level.

Lifelong Learning

The TG on lifelong learning and Employability, composed of ESU and EURASHE representatives in the WG, recognised that any decisive progress in lifelong learning should involve a change in paradigm, i.e. lifelong learning should no longer be considered as an aim in itself but be apprehended as an integral part of the social responsibility of higher education institutions: duty to the student body to train/retrain in order to improve its employability; duty to the world of work to provide well trained

responsive individuals for employment; duty to society to allow all individuals to be active members of society.

Put it differently, it was highlighted that higher education should exist within the whole continuum of lifelong learning, from basic education to advanced research as the needs of Europe's populations develop over time and targeted actions are required aimed at widening the participation of mature students in higher education. For this purpose, formal and informal barriers to study for mature students should be eliminated through, inter alia, Recognition of Prior Learning and incentives for both students and higher education institutions to engage with one another throughout adult life.

Finally, the TG pointed at the need to develop a guidelines document to assist the EHEA countries in their efforts to integrate lifelong learning in higher education systems, institutions, and society for the upcoming 2015-2018 period.