



EUROSTUDENT Project
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Declaration

of the ECStA and the EUROSTUDENT Network

Preamble

The European Council for Student Affairs (ECStA) is an independent and autonomous umbrella organisation aiming to promote the social infrastructure in all higher education institutions of Europe. In particular, the organisation promotes the mobility of students in Europe within the area of the Bologna Process. The organisation was established in 1999 and currently has 17 members from 11 different countries in Europe.

The EUROSTUDENT Network was established as voluntary network of independent student research institutions at the request of the Director Generals of Higher Education in Weimar in 1999. Its purpose is to collect comparable key data on the socio-economic framework conditions of studying in Europe. The following 11 countries participated in the most recent phase of the project: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom (England, Wales).

Objectives of the conference

The Joint Conference in Berlin 16/17 June 2005, organized by ECStA and the EUROSTUDENT Network, focussed on the topic “Shaping the Social Dimension – a priority for the enlarged European Higher Education Area”.

The EUROSTUDENT Report 2005 was released on the conference. The report was coordinated by HIS, Hochschul-Informationen-System GmbH, Hannover, and financially supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the European Commission.

Up until now the main focus of the Bologna Process has been on the compatibility of the course structures in different higher education systems. However, the success of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) depends to a high degree on the establishment of adequate socio-economic framework conditions of student life. These conditions have a substantial impact on access to higher education, study progress and successful completion.

The purpose of the conference was to identify issues for the improvement of the social dimension in the EHEA by bringing together international experts actively involved in this working area. In recognition of this fact, the conference was sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Higher Education and Research as well as by the European Commission. Over 80 representatives of national ministries, student service organisations, students and other European partnership organisations attended the conference.

Recommendations and conclusions

The following conclusions and recommendations were drawn up:

The participants welcome the decision of the Ministers responsible for higher education in Bergen to take up the social dimension as a new challenge and priority of the Bologna Process. However, we call upon the Ministers of Higher Education to move the social

dimension to the centre of the debate in preparation for the next Ministers' conference in London 2007.

In particular, we encourage the Ministers of Higher Education to look closely at the following aspects of the social dimension of the EHEA and to determine the appropriate course of action in each respect:

- Adequate national support schemes for students in order to cover their costs of living
- Portable study financing systems in order to enhance student mobility. Incentives to improve student mobility should be provided taking into account the special (financial) needs of students from low-income families
- Sufficient availability of affordable accommodation for students in towns and cities with universities, and inexpensive catering in canteens
- Improvement of counselling, advisory and support services to students. In particular the use of tutors at seminars and student residences to improve support for foreign students
- Provision of appropriate support and aid for foreign students, students with children and also for students with disabilities
- Substantial reduction of the impact of social selection mechanisms such as admission restrictions during the run-up to studying. In all EHEA states efforts are to be made to achieve a high study quota, in order to increase the proportion of young people who come from underprivileged, educationally deprived or disadvantaged backgrounds. Policies to increase and widen opportunities for access to under-represented groups should be developed
- Removal of impediments to mobility such as restrictive visa policy, conditions of obtaining residence permits, internship and labour-market regulations etc.

As a first step, the Ministers of the Bergen conference have assigned the task of presenting comparable data on the social and economic situation of students to the Bologna Follow-up Group. This is seen by the participants of the joint ECStA and EUROSTUDENT conference as an important prerequisite to the implementation of strategies for shaping and improving the social dimension of the EHEA.

The mapping of the social dimension should particularly focus on the following aspects:

- On the one hand, the infrastructure which frames students' lives in terms of income (state funding programmes, jobs, family support etc.), outgoings (contributions to higher education institutions, accommodation etc.) and course structure (particularly flexibility) should be captured.
- On the other, statistical analyses should be carried out to give an insight into the actual strategies used by students to cope with these factors during their studies. This data should explore problem areas and identify disadvantaged groups in higher education (by age, gender, social background, minorities etc.).
- National socio-economic reports should provide the basis for a European comparison and thereby facilitate individual countries' efforts to position themselves within the European context.
- The EUROSTUDENT project and the national social surveys on which it is based are an important source of core data for this task. It has established a network of partner institutions which collate key data based on common standards.
- The Bologna Follow-up Group should take on the responsibility for coordinating the different data sources and draw-up a Trend Report on the basis of this information.

In common accord, the European Council for Student Affairs (ECStA) and the EUROSTUDENT Network request that the EUROSTUDENT Report is established as permanent monitoring instrument and that the Network receives adequate support to facilitate its extension to all signatory states of the Bologna Process. Furthermore, we request that

ECStA receives the status of an official partner in the Bologna Process as the only umbrella organisation on European scale that promotes the social infrastructure in European higher education institutions. This status should be comparable to the one given to the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB).