



N.B.: The present document, which was drafted jointly by EUA, EI and ESU, is intended as a discussion input for the Stockholm BFUG meeting.

EUA-EI-ESU input paper on measuring and promoting student and staff mobility

I. Introduction

Improving transnational student and staff mobility is one of the key objectives of the Bologna process and a core principle of European integration in general. Although significant reforms have taken place with the introduction of the three-cycle degree structure and other Bologna tools, the impression prevails that mobility has not significantly improved. However, currently this assumption can neither be supported nor refuted by statistical evidence.

In order to further enhance mobility, European Ministers in charge of higher education set out a concrete benchmark:

"In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad" (Leuven Communiqué). The BFUG has been invited: *"To define the indicators used for measuring and monitoring mobility..."*

In addition, on 8 July 2009, the European Commission launched the Green Paper 'Promoting the learning mobility of young people', which contains useful food for thought on this topic.

Improving mobility is particularly important to universities and their students and staff, as they are the immediate beneficiaries, and also the actors who turn mobility into reality. Therefore the European University Association (EUA), Education International (EI) and the European Students' Union (ESU) have decided to join forces in order to move this agenda forward, in order to ensure that the perspectives of universities, staff and students is taken into consideration in the discussions on the mobility benchmark and mobility indicators, but also in order to deliver a concrete and tangible contribution to the enhancement of transnational student and staff mobility in Europe.

In this paper:

- A working definition for student and staff mobility is proposed, to clarify of what has to be considered when measuring mobility;
- The challenges of measuring mobility are addressed, in order to develop strategies for a better methodology and improved indicators;
- Further, an agenda for action is proposed, with a clear role for universities and students for mapping and promoting mobility at institutional level.

The three organisations will follow up with their constituencies on the proposed approach in 2010 and the following years, and simultaneously contribute to the discussions at the level of the BFUG.



II. Definitions

If mobility is to be measured, there should be a clear definition of what is considered mobility. The report from the Bologna Process Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility of staff and Students (2007) provided the following definitions:

- *Mobility of students*: Refers to a study period in a country other than that of prior permanent residence or prior education (completed or ongoing) for a period of study or a full degree.
- *Mobility of staff*: Refers to a working period in a country other than that of prior permanent residence or prior employment (terminated or ongoing) for a limited or extended period.

The definitions given below are an attempt to further refine the topic of mobility for the purposes of the Bologna process. Although 'virtual mobility' plays an important role in the internationalisation of universities, it is not included in the definitions.

A. Student mobility:

Student mobility in European higher education can be characterised as follows:

- It refers to mobility periods of students, who are enrolled at universities part or full-time, during the period of their studies;
- It is **transnational**: crossing geographical and national borders is essential in strengthening and deepening intercultural awareness;
- It is **physical**;
- It serves a **learning purpose**: no matter whether it's an exchange programme, a language course or work placement, PhD research carried out in a lab a library or a company, the mobility period should serve a learning purpose and this purpose should be recognised and agreed by the parties concerned;
- It is either **organised** on a formal or takes place on an **individual** basis: student mobility can take place in the framework of a programme (e.g. Erasmus), but also upon the initiative by the student or institution;
- It can have **various durations**; the time spent should be meaningful in the context of the objectives set.

B. Staff mobility:

Staff Mobility in European higher education can be characterised as follows:

- It refers to mobility periods undertaken by **employees** of higher education institutions, thus including teaching, research and administrative staff;
- It is **transnational**;
- It is **physical**;
- It is either **structured** or takes place on an **individual** basis, for a **defined duration** and undertaken with the **intention to return**, therefore excluding migration;
- It is a period during which **teaching, research or training** takes place, either as a one-time activity or recurrent in the framework of a partnership.

III. The challenges of measuring mobility

Following the political aspiration, the intention is to be able to identify by 2020 how many bachelor, master and doctoral graduates have been mobile at some point in their period of study. A cumulative sum should then add up to 20% of the total student population. Currently some aspects of mobility are already measured on a regular basis (e.g.):

- Student and staff mobility taking place within the Erasmus programme;
- Eurostat data on the number of foreign students in a country;
- Eurostudent data on mobility periods.

However, it is also known that these measurements have considerable **flaws**. To provide some examples:

- Although the Erasmus programme is an important pillar of student and staff mobility, data on Erasmus do not cover all mobility activities that take place at institutional level and in many cases may only cover a minority of mobility activities;
- Measuring international mobility by counting the number of foreign students enrolled in higher education does not adequately reflect the number of foreign students, as the figure also includes domestic students with a foreign passport. Changing the indicator to 'previous degree obtained in another country' would be more precise;
- Surveying student samples does provide useful data on student mobility activities, student needs and aspirations, but it cannot demonstrate the activities that take place at institutional level.
- It is impossible to distinguish between individual student mobility and a student who: took part in Erasmus, studied a master degree in another country and gained work experience through an internship. Such a person would be counted three times and thus distort the number.

Defining indicators that adequately reflect the extent to which student and staff mobility take place in higher education is a complicated task. Following the definitions of mobility proposed above, it becomes quite evident that not all data can be collected by statistical agencies. Shorter mobility periods (e.g. for work placements), can be as important to the learning experience as obtaining a degree in another country. If such experience is widespread among a given student cohort then the overall impact may be considerable, but might not be recorded. The same is true for short teaching assignments abroad for professors.

A way to complement the data currently raised by statistical agencies is that higher education institutions would map existing mobility activities and identify areas for improvement according to a clearly defined scheme. This can be seen as a strategic opportunity as it enhances knowledge of institutional practice and can thus be translated into improved institutional governance. It is also a way of strengthening an institution's international profile.



IV. An agenda for improving student and staff mobility

The aspirations set out by the Bologna ministers should be achievable if the following items are addressed:

- **Understanding** mobility: agreeing on definitions for student and staff mobility is necessary. A new input to this discussion was provided in this paper.
- **Measuring** mobility: better European level data is needed to measure more precisely the mobility patterns at European and at country level. A further refinement of the indicators used is therefore crucial. Universities need to map existing mobility activities, in order to better understand and demonstrate the amount of mobility taking place within the institution, which simultaneously can promote further growth in these initiatives.
- Increased **promotion** of mobility: national and institutional policy should promote and facilitate the mobility of students and staff, with a view to achieve balanced mobility.

Reaching the political aspiration should be seen as the driver to improve mobility activities in the next decade and the collection of data as a tool to demonstrate progress. The search for the right indicators can never replace the advocacy work that is needed to promote student and staff mobility. Achieving progress is only possible when all parties are convinced of the benefits and the right support mechanisms at all levels are in place to support this aim.