



General report

“Student Participation in Higher Education Governance”

Aghveran, Armenia, 8-9 December 2011

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Introduction

“Student participation in higher education governance” was an official Bologna Seminar organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia, the European Students’ Union and the Council of Europe, that took place on 8-9 December 2011, in Aghveran, Armenia. The full programme of the seminar can be found in Annex I of this report. Approximately 75 participants from Armenia and 25 international participants have attended the seminar.

The objective of the seminar was to look into current issues of student participation in higher education governance, from institutional to national and international levels, outlining the main problems and obstacles, looking for examples of good practice and proposing a way forward, as it was defined in the Background document of the seminar.

The report tries to give a comprehensive outline of the main discussions held at the seminar and to provide a list of conclusions which emanate from the outcomes agreed by the participants of the seminar. These recommendations should feed into the further development of student participation within the European Higher Education Area.

The report has been structured into three main parts. In the part on the development of student participation, we have gathered the overviews of the current context of student participation, given at the seminar, from various perspectives and as a resume of what has been much more elaborated in the Background document. We have tried to avoid the repetition and thus strongly recommend further reference to the Background document. In the second part of the report, we have analyzed the issues raised as crucial to the successful student participation from different angles: *students as learners*, *students as members of the academic community* and *students as citizens*. The third and the last section of the report focuses on possible solutions and courses of action to the identified. The challenges are divided into two subsections: what can students do and what can other stakeholders do? At the end of the report, we have listed a number of concrete conclusions and recommendations which can lead the policy development process in the field of student participation in Europe.

Development of student participation – setting the scene

Ever since Prague communiqué in 2001, “students are [considered] full members of the academic community”. In reality, students have been members of the academic community much longer, ever since the foundation of European universities in the medieval times as it has been repeated throughout the conference. 2001 marked the beginning of the official recognition of the student involvement in higher education governance, even though it has existed ever since the founding of the universities in Europe. In 2003, the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Education organised a Bologna seminar in Oslo on student participation. The Council of Europe survey, which preceded the seminar, showed a wide and positive attitude towards increased student influence in higher education governance. Already then, student participation was seen as a general feature of higher education in Europe. Ever since 2003, student involvement has grown and has been anonymously accepted as a principle among all stakeholders in the European Higher Education Area. We will not elaborate the overview of the student participation development through policy frameworks of the Bologna Process, the Council of Europe and the European Students’ Union as they have been thoroughly presented in the Background Document.

Throughout the seminar, it was stated that student participation is a continuous process – there is no option “mission accomplished”. Partnership among all members of the academic community requires a continuous process of involvement in all decisions making mechanisms at all levels: institutional, national/federal and European and moreover, in all issues. Student participation cannot be limited to “student” issues, as much as it cannot be accomplished through formal representation alone.

If we would wish to define student participation we could use the definition given by Manja Klemenčič, from the Centre for Education Policy Studies in Slovenia, in her presentation: “students’ formal and actual ability to influence decisions made in the context of a higher education institution or public authority”. Fundamental elements of student participation, as Klemenčič further explained, are: degrees of intensity, domains, multilevel nature. Degrees of intensity include, as the Budapest Declaration of the European Students’ Union depicts: access to information, consultation, (structured) dialogue and partnership (shared responsibilities in each step of the institutional decision making). The nature of student participation strongly varies and there is no one-size-fits-all model. This was shown in the presentation on national

policies on student participation in institutional governance in Armenia, Germany and in Finland, respectively given by Karina Harutyunyan, Deputy Minister of Education of Armenia, Bastian Baumann from EU Consult and Terhi Nokkala from the Finnish Institute for Education Research at the University of Jyväskylä. The diversity of institutional and governance models cannot be an excuse for the lack of student representation. Student participation is a principle and it can be implemented regardless of different approaches to higher education governance.

Another reiterating issue has been the fine limit between formal participation and genuine participation. As Manja Klemenčič pointed out, there is a phenomenon of weakening formal and strengthening informal student participation. In the recent governance changes, governance structures require further development of inclusion of student representatives on an equal basis. Students need not to be only listened to, but they need to be heard.

The survey conducted by Council of Europe in 2003 and authored by Annika Persson showed the state of the art and covered 22 countries. The students claimed the support from other stakeholders and the legal framework, so they could increase their influence. The national level was considered as the weakest level for student participation. Already at that time, students expressed their concerns about the implementation of the Bologna Process, the social dimension, student-centred learning, flexible learning paths and access, the diminishing power of collegial bodies against the trend to introduce managerial structures into HEL, lack of transparency and corruption etc. A number of conclusions from the Oslo seminar have proved to be pertinent today. It was agreed that a further involvement of students is needed at all levels of decision making. At the Oslo seminar in 2003¹, it was suggested that student representatives need an encouraging environment which includes recognition and certification of the experience, competences and skills acquired by being a student representative but also financial, logistical and human resources. Additionally, the report recognised the need for accountability, transparency and flow of information. Student participation was acknowledged as essential to citizenship and development of the society, international responsibility of solidarity and co-operation.

We cannot avoid asking if there have been any changes since 2003 and what progress has been achieved. Even the fact that this seminar was the first one dedicated to student participation since 2003, is an answer by itself. Nevertheless, the commitment of the ministers in the Ministerial Declarations has not ceased to be repeated, but the real impact of student participation has not been evaluated outside of the diligent work of the European Students' Union. The data on student participation continue to be partial and outdated,

¹ General Report, Oslo seminar, 2003, http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/030612-14General_Report_Oslo.pdf

thus one of the main conclusions of this seminar was recognition of the need for a new comprehensive survey in the European Higher Education Area which would bring comprehensive data on student participation across all 47 member countries of the Bologna Process.

Students' roles in higher education

Students as learners

The University is a place for common research and knowledge, a place where knowledge is being produced and deliberated, an open space for dialogue and critical thinking. As pointed out by Jean-Philippe Restoueix from the Council of Europe, the university is a place of personal development, citizenship, democracy and employability. As such, it requires dialogue between different partners, different actors. Student participation in the production of knowledge and research needs to be acknowledged as equally valuable and indispensable.

Student participation in quality assurance has been one of the key issues in the Bologna Process, but also one of the success stories of student participation. The European Students' Union has been actively involved in advocacy of student participation in quality assurance processes and providing expertise, including internal, external, accreditation councils and quality assurance agencies' work. Allan Päll, chairperson of European Students' Union, and Liliya Ivanova, member of the Student Union Development Committee of ESU, presented the ESU Quality Assurance Pool and the QUEST project.² The student involvement in quality assurance has also been largely discussed in one of the working group sessions where the participants have had an opportunity to exchange experiences and good practices. As pointed out in the presentation of Helka Kekäläinen, vice president of ENQA, even though we can express a certain level of satisfaction of student involvement in quality assurance, new challenges still lie ahead. Lately, we are witnessing the development of profession/field accreditation practices which have still not fully embraced student participation and they require our close attention. Moreover, students' participation in quality assurance processes requires transparent procedures and visible results for students. Students' motivation for participation can be enhanced only through effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures.

² More information can be found on www.esu-online.org.

Another key issue in the learning process is the paradigm shift to student centred learning. The presentation given by Professor Jussi Välimaa from the University of Jyväskylä in Finland and the latter discussion confirmed that we need a culture change in pedagogy which would bring student to centre of the learning process. Student centred learning represents a more rewarding process for all, both students and academic staff, along with heightened responsibilities of students for their learning process and increased engagement of academic staff. Student participation starts in the classroom.

Students as members of the academic community

National policies on student participation in institutional governance and legislative frameworks present a necessary, but not sufficient, basis for successful student participation. They can serve as a guarantee, but without proper implementation they can be used solely as lip service of the governance structures. The European Students' Union further raised students' demands for full participation through the Budapest Declaration adopted in February 2011 at the 21st European Student Convention.³ Perceiving students as "main actors in higher education", there is still a long road for the European Higher Education Area member countries in achieving full student participation. In the presentation of Karl Agius, member of the Social Affairs Committee of ESU, the participants of the seminar have also been reminded of the 2008 Students' Rights Charter adopted by the members of the European Students' Union. The Charter reaffirms students' right to student involvement, to organise freely, the right to co-governance, among others. Students need to fully participate in agenda setting, voting and implementation of all issues concerning academic community.

Recent changes in governance structures and the introduction of new public management practices, as rightly pointed out by Per Nyborg, have heavily influenced student participation in higher education. The pursuit of international competitiveness and the growing perception of students as consumers pose a threat to the full understanding of students as partners in higher education. It is a shift to a "model of universities providing services that are useful in terms recognisable by the state and business".⁴ This new model of universities changes the role of internal stakeholders, including students, to a more advisory one. Student participation narrows down to the provision of student specific services, including the importance of participation in quality assurance processes but only through the eyes of a customer.

³ Full text of the Budapest declaration can be found here: <http://www.esu-online.org/news/article/6065/58/> .

⁴ Klemenčič M. (2011) *The public role of higher education and student participation in higher education governance*. In: BRENNAN, J., and SHAH, T. (2011) *Higher education and society in changing times: looking back and looking forward*. London: Center for Higher Education Research and Information, CHERI, pp. 74-83

In one of the working group sessions, the participants discussed the discordance between the legislative and governance frameworks and their implementation in reality. Governance structures need to follow the changing reality of universities while adhering to the principles of common ownership of all members of the academic community and equal participation of students and other internal stakeholders. Introduction of new governance structures and external stakeholders as their new members must not prevent full student participation.

Students as citizens

Student participation enhances active citizenship and serves as an indicator of democracy and the culture of dialogue. Students can act as agents of development, international solidarity and cooperation which have already been pointed out in the conclusions from the Oslo seminar in 2003. Again, student participation is “of particular relevance for students’ civic learning, as one of the purposes or social roles of higher education”.⁵

Student participation can help fight the general distrust in democratic processes. Low participation of students in student representation and student organisations is a reflection of the overall lowering participation issues in the public life of society of its citizens. Universities should be the progressive role model for the rest of society and need to encourage young people to actively get involved. This can only be achieved through appropriate mechanisms free of any legal, disciplinary or success retributions.

During the session of one of the working groups, active citizenship was recognised as one of the essential features of higher education. Universities should be an environment providing safe space for critical thinking and promotion of diversity – it is time, place and need to think for students. Promotion of diversity and access to higher education needs to be equally taken into account and put into practice within student organisations themselves. Student representatives have an equal responsibility for the promotion of democracy and active citizenship as the rest of the academic community, as it has been pointed out by Allan Päll, chairperson of ESU.

⁵ Klemenčič M. (2011) *The public role of higher education and student participation in higher education governance*. In: BRENNAN, J., and SHAH, T. (2011) *Higher education and society in changing times: looking back and looking forward*. London: Center for Higher Education Research and Information, CHERI, pp. 74-83

What next?

What can students do?

As it was repeated on numerous occasions throughout the seminar, students themselves and student organisations have an equal responsibility for the further enhancement of student participation in higher education. Besides their advocacy efforts and provision of high level expertise, student organisations need to assure professional representation, full representativeness of their organisations and structures through democratic internal procedures and the continuity of student representatives, which includes efficient transfer of knowledge to the constantly incoming new generations of student leaders. Student organisations are also responsible for the provision of information on student participation in higher education governance and learning processes. Informing students also includes education about models of student participation and its values.

Student organisations need to encourage diversity within their own structures and dialogue among their members.

What can other stakeholders do?

Formal involvement, through legislation or governance structures, does not guarantee actual representation. Student participation requires dedication from the higher education institutions management structures through long term institutional support and resources. Student participation requires financial, logistical and other means which can provide a welcoming and an encouraging environment as an incentive for motivating students to get involved. Besides the declarative political will on the national and institutional levels, there is a need for transposition of that will into a reality. Proper implementation of student participation needs to follow the changes in institutional governance.

Democratic governance requires transparent procedures which can provide possibility for students to have equal access to all information needed for full participation in the decision making processes. All relevant stakeholders in higher education need to encourage common ownership of the academic community and shared responsibilities towards a real partnership culture. The results of student participation need to be made visible and the freedom of expression and action of students needs to be unthreatened.

The overview of the conclusions

- Students are full members of the academic community.
- Student participation is a continuous process.
- Student participation needs to be implemented in all decision making mechanisms at all levels in all issues.
- It is essential to differentiate formal from genuine student participation.
- Conclusions from the 2003 Oslo seminar are still pertinent and require follow up.
- There is a need for a new comprehensive survey on student participation in EHEA.
- Student participation in the production of knowledge and research needs to be regarded as equally valuable.
- Student participation in QA presents a success story in EHEA, but still more needs to be done: student participation in profession/field accreditation, the full transparency of QA procedures and the assurance of the visibility of the results of QA procedures.
- Student centred learning requires a culture change and is essential for student participation, as the participation starts in the classroom.
- National policies and legislative frameworks are necessary but not sufficient tools for student participation.
- Student participation requires full participation in agenda setting, voting and implementation of all issues concerning academic community.
- It is important to tackle the threat of the perception of students as consumers instead as partners.
- Student participation enhances active citizenship and represents an indicator of democracy and the culture of dialogue.
- Student organisations need to assure professional representation, representativeness of their structures and democratic internal procedures, continuity and efficient transfer of knowledge.
- Student representatives need to provide information to students and encourage diversity within their own structures.
- HEI management structures need to provide long term institutional support and financial, logistical and other resources as well as an encouraging and welcoming environment for student participation through transparent procedures, equal access to all information and a real partnership culture.

Further reading

- Klemenčič M. (2011) **Student representation in European higher education governance: principles and practice, roles and benefits**. In: Eva Egron-Polak, Jürgen Kohler, Sjur Bergan and Lewis Purser (eds.)(2011) Handbook on Leadership and Governance in Higher Education. Leadership and Good governance of HEIs. Structures, actors and roles. Berlin: RAABE Academic Publishers, pp. 1-26.
- Klemenčič M. (2011) **The public role of higher education and student participation in higher education governance**. In: BRENNAN, J., and SHAH, T. (2011) Higher education and society in changing times: looking back and looking forward. London: Center for Higher Education Research and Information, CHERI, pp. 74-83.
- Sjur Bergan (ed) (2004): **The University as Res Publica: Higher Education Governance, Student Participation and the University as a Site of Citizenship** (Strasbourg 4: Council of Europe Publishing Council of Europe Higher Education Series No 1)

DRAFT PROGRAMME

8 December 2011

13:30-14:00 *Registration of participants*

14:00-14:30 **Opening of the seminar**

- Welcome by Mr Armen Ashotyan, the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia
- Welcome by Mr Jean-Philippe Restoueix, Council of Europe
- Welcome by Mr Allan Päll, Chairperson of the European Students' Union

14:30-15:30 **First session: Student participation in the European Higher Education Area: setting the scene**

Introduction by Mr Jean-Philippe Restoueix, Council of Europe

“Student participation: main developments and challenges”, by Dr Manja Klemenčič, Post-doctoral researcher, Centre for Education Policy Studies, University of Ljubljana

“Mapping the status of student participation in Europe”, by Karl Agius, member of Social Affairs Committee of ESU

Discussion

15:30-16:00 *Coffee break*

16:00-17:15 **Second session: National policies on student participation in institutional governance.**

“National policy on student participation in institutional governance: example of Armenia”, by Karine Harutyunyan, the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Armenia

“National policy on student participation in institutional governance: example of Finland”, Dr Terhi Nokkala, Research Fellow, Finnish Institute for Educational Research

“National policy on student participation in institutional governance: example of Germany”, Mr Bastian Baumann, Higher Education Consultant

Discussion

Wrap-up of the first day

9 December 2011

9:00- 10:30 Third session: Student participation in quality assurance of higher education

“Student participation in quality assurance of higher education: view of ENQA”, by Ms Helka Kekäläinen, Vice-President, ENQA

“ESU Quality Assurance Pool and QUEST project outcomes”, by Mr Allan Päll, ESU Chairperson and Ms Liliya Ivanova, Member of the Students’ Union Development Committee of ESU

- 10:30-11:45** **Three parallel working group sessions (world café concept⁶).**
1. **First session:** How would you describe the coherency of legislative provision for student participation with the actual practice both on the national and institutional level?
 2. **Second session:** How can students' involvement in quality assurance make students' voice heard and advance the learning environment. Please elaborate according to the following levels:
 - a) internal quality assurance mechanisms on the HEI level
 - b) involvement in external review
 - c) involvement in Quality Assurance Agencies' governance
 3. **Third session:** How student participation in the higher education governance enhances the active citizenship
- 11:45-12:30** **An information session on the presentation of study on Higher Education Graduate Labor Demand and Employment in Armenia**
- Respondent: ESU, Students' Advancement of Graduates' Employability, Bologna With Students' Eyes 2012
- 12:30-14:00** *Lunch*
- 14:00-14:30** **Feedback from working groups sessions**

⁶ <http://www.theworldcafe.com/method.html>

14:30-15:00 **Introductory Session to the Panel debate**

“The Challenges from Budapest: the ESU declaration”, Mr Allan Päll, Chairperson of the European Students’ Union

Respondent: Dr Per Nyborg, former Chair of the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research and Head of the Bologna Secretariat from 2003-2005 (Norway)

15:00-16:00 **Panel debate: How can universities encourage student participation in institutional governance?**

Moderator: Mr Bastian Baumann, Higher Education Consultant

Panel members:

- a representative of national authorities of Armenia;
- a representative of national authorities of another European country
- a university representative
- Harutyun Azgaldyan, Student at Yerevan State University
- an ESU representative
- Per Nyborg

16:00-16:30 **Presentation of the Final report by the General Rapporteur**

Ms Milica Popović, Council of Europe expert

16:30 **Closing of the seminar**

