

National framework underpinning internationalisation of higher education and research in the Republic of Serbia

May 2014

WORK PACKAGE 1:

DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

WP1: Lead by University of Ghent, Belgium

Rationale:

The analysis and assessment of the state of affairs in Serbian higher education and research from the point of view of internationalisation aims to provide fresh perspectives on the challenges faced by the Serbian universities and HE authorities. Even though the apparent absence of HE internationalisation strategies, policies and standards at the level of the state is both a clear starting point and an indication of the Project's overall relevance, the report on the current national framework underpinning internationalisation in Serbia (conducted by the University of Novi Sad on the basis of inputs from all Serbian partners in the initial phase of the Project) will also be used in the design and organization of the study visit of Serbian partners to the University of Ghent (16-20 June 2014). The main aim of the study visit will be the transfer of know-how on ways in which national legislative underpinning internationalisation could be developed and implemented. The content and design of this study visit will be directly related to the key challenges identified in this report. Moreover, the findings will get relevant HE stakeholders in Serbia well acquainted with, and more aware of, the current strengths and weaknesses, needs and gaps, obstacles and opportunities of internationalization in Serbian higher education and research.

Sections:

- 1) Based on the Sipus Report from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MESTD) on the process of internationalisation in HE and research from the level of the state;
- 2) Based on Sipus analyses of the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the process of internationalisation in Serbian higher education and research from the point of view of Serbian universities.

SECTION 1

- a) Short description of the strategy of the Serbian government related to internationalization of higher education and research:

The Government of the Republic of Serbia (RS) adopted in October 2012 the **Strategy of the Development of Education in Serbia 2020** which states that the vision for the development of higher education incorporates: internationalization; mobility of students and staff; quality, relevance, efficiency, coverage and modernization of HE.

Some of the goals of the Strategy are:

- Internationalization of the HE study programmes;
- Offering more study programs in foreign languages;
- Increasing the number of joint study programs, especially master studies with foreign universities;
- Increasing the mobility of teaching staff across the countries of the European Higher Education Area;
- Supporting the mobility of most successful students from RS and receiving high quality students from abroad;
- Establishment of PhD schools;
- Support for participation of teachers and students in international research projects (e.g. Horizon 2020)
- Intensive university cooperation in EU programs RS is eligible for (e.g. specific actions of Erasmus +)

The Strategy states that HE studies in the Republic of Serbia should be implementing the principles and standards that apply to the universities of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and that they are suitable for foreign students as well. The Strategy envisages that by 2020 at least 10% of all students come from abroad.

The Action Plans for the Strategy are in the process of gathering opinions from the relevant national bodies/institutions.

Currently, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is expecting official opinions on the text of the Agreement on the participation of Serbia in Erasmus+ (2014-2020) from SEIO, Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Republic Secretariat for Legislation, and then the Agreement is expected to be adopted by the Government. European Commission requested at the Bilateral Screening of the RS for Chapter 26 - education and culture (4th April 2014, Brussels) that the Agreement should be signed by both sides by the end of April 2014.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted in 2010 the **Strategy for Scientific and Technological Development, 2010 – 2015**.

„A mechanisms for integrating scientists from the Diaspora in national projects will be created. Higher mobility of local scientists will naturally improve the chances for employment of scientists who return from abroad to the institutes and faculties in Serbia. The program to return scientists to Serbia will be implemented through shorter or longer study visits which will ensure necessary resources for those scientists who wish to continue a part or their whole career here in Serbia. They will be enabled to gather their teams and provide the necessary research equipment.”

Partnership with international organizations through programs and developing databases and relevant statistical methodology:

“Ministry shall develop methods for closer monitoring of developments in science and research in the country, and leverage the best experience from around the world in the domain of scientific and technological policies. Only in this way, on the basis of genuine and accurate information, valid management decisions could be made. The short term focus will be to complete the database of researchers in Serbia and our researchers in Diaspora, and then gather the data on scientific projects and institutions”.

b) Other legislation related to internationalization

The main legal framework, the current **Law on Higher Education** (LHE) adopted in September 2005 in the Parliament, is entirely in line with the Bologna Principles. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is going to increase the activities on the implementation of internationalization in higher education through Amendments to the Law by: complying with the Lisbon Convention, recognition of diplomas obtained abroad (professional and academic recognition), granting residence permits to foreign students, solving problems of visas for students, providing scholarships and accommodation for foreign students, etc.

The Law on Higher Education acknowledged that HE reforms were not likely to be effective unless there was a gradual change in the mode of university governance. It therefore created a framework for the process of university integration, supporting a number of integrative functions. International cooperation and mobility were, from a legislative point of view, perceived as a responsibility of an ‘integrated’ university.

c) Comments on policies focused on:

- Students
- Grants
- Underserved groups (diversity)
- Procedure for new degrees

Student Services (regulated by the Law on Students' and Pupils' Standard):

- successful students of lower property status: loans or scholarships;
- right to food and accommodation in student facilities;
- facilities for resting and recovering, performing cultural, artistic, sporting and recreational activities;
- full health insurance: all students at public and private HEI's up to the age of 27.

Student representative Bodies:

- Student Parliaments at each HEI;
- Student Conference of the Universities (SCONUS) and Student Conference of the Professional Colleges at the State Level;
- Student Associations (Student Union of Serbia, Students Association of Belgrade, etc.);
- Permanent Student representatives in NCHE;
- Student participation in the accreditation process.

Proposal of a new *Law on Student Organizing* formulated by the Working Group of the MESTD and discussed among all students' bodies: the next step is the adoption by the Government, before being addressed to the National Assembly for final adoption.

Serbian National Qualifications Framework

- November 2010: the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) adopted the first version of the Serbian National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (SNQF) based on learning outcomes, compatible with the Bologna QF of the CoE and, partially, with EQF;
- February 2012: the National Assembly adopted Amendments to the LHE which represent a legal basis for the adoption of SNQF;
- October 2013: NCHE adopted an improved version of the SNQF completely compatible with EQF and proposed it to the MESTD for final adoption; the proposal contains the introduction of the Council for Qualifications, Sectoral Councils and other professional bodies;
- March 2014: MESTD initiated the procedure for formal adoption of the SNQF;
- March 2014: MESTD founded a Commission for formulating a proposal of a new comprehensive Law on Qualifications Framework containing all qualification levels;
- Current Amendments of the LHE contain adjustments necessary to achieve legal compatibility with EQF and Bologna QF:
 - introduction of the short cycle,



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Policies at Universities in Serbia



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- introduction of the professional master
- academic specialization within the third cycle.

Adoption by the National Assembly expected probably by the end of 2014.

PLANS:

Short term:

- Amendments of the LHE (Recognition of Qualifications, National Qualifications Framework) ;
- Action plans for the Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020;
- Adoption of NQF for Higher Education;
- Law on Student Organizing.

Longer term:

- Increased students` and teachers` mobility, respecting the Bucharest Communiqué *Strengthening mobility for better learning*;
- Much stronger cooperation with industry, resulting in better capacity planning and admission strategy connected with employability;
- Developing the social dimension of higher education;
- Improving student support services, counseling and guidance;
- Insisting on the triangle HE – Research – Innovations as a driving force for economy;
- Increasing public funding for both HE and research.

SECTION 2

ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL LEGISLATION PROVIDED BY THE SERBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

University of Belgrade

Introduction

Current academic activities at the University of Belgrade, particularly those related to science, technology and research, take place within an internationalized context.

The University of Belgrade engages in considerable activity at the international scene regarding teaching, research and faculty / students exchange, i.e. taking part in the international mobility programmes for faculty / students in the European academic space. However, the University should invest further effort toward internationalization with the prospective of becoming more visible and competitive at the international academic stage.

Regarding the fact that the demographic figures in Serbia show a decreasing trend and that realistic prognoses point to a diminishing number of students in the future, it is necessary to compensate for it by attracting more foreign students.

The International Cooperation Department has the responsibility to promote internationalization and will certainly play a key role in its implementation; however, it can only prove successful if the entire academic community will support changes required by the internationalization process. These entail changes in numerous regulations, procedures and academic culture, but also demand funds and support to the faculty, administration and services so that they could face and tackle the necessary changes.

1. National Strategy for Internationalization

Following introduction of the Higher Education Act (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia” No. 76/05, 100/07, 97/08 and 44/10), the universities in the Republic of Serbia have implemented the principles of the Bologna Process in the higher education sector, which has allowed for closer cooperation with the universities from the EHEA¹ countries. Cooperation in research domain also takes place through international programmes.

SWOT Analysis Results

Inner strengths:

- Academic studies in the Republic Serbia are organized following the principles and standards applied at the EHEA universities and are adapted to the needs of foreign students as well, so that at least 10% of the student population may be foreign students.

¹ European Higher Education Area



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- The higher education market is open to foreign university programmes, under the same conditions as Serbian universities (accreditation, licensing, etc.).
- Serbian universities cooperate actively with foreign universities, primarily from the EHEA countries, fostering faculty/student exchange, carrying out joint research in accordance with ERA² research programmes and taking part in the EU programmes.
- The number of faculties accrediting study programmes in the English language is increasing steadily.

Inner weaknesses:

- Foreign students are still low in numbers, since the programmes in English or other foreign languages are rather scarce; however, there are students coming from former Yugoslav republics who can follow programmes in Serbian.
- Foreign students face quite a few administrative barriers (visas, residence permits, insurance etc.) which add more impediments to their decision to come and study in Serbia.
- Joint study programmes with foreign universities are few.
- Recognition of foreign diplomas is rather complicated at some higher education institutions, since they apply their own criteria and standards (this is particularly relevant for PhD Diplomas), or they equalize study programmes (which is not in accordance with legal procedures for foreign diploma recognition), requiring holders of valid foreign university diplomas to sit for additional exams.

Opportunities:

- Increasing number of foreign students at Serbian institutions of higher education.
- Increasing number of Serbian students at EHEA higher education institutions.
- Favourable experiences of students from Africa and the Middle East, who have already traced a tradition of studying at Serbian universities.
- Maintaining and increasing numbers of students from former Yugoslav republics, who, among other things, do not face the linguistic barrier (students coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia).

Threats:

- Complicated administrative procedures hamper foreign students' enrolment in Serbian universities.
- Procedures to recognize foreign diplomas are too slow and intricate.
- Joint study programmes with foreign universities are too few.
- Offer of study programmes in English and other languages is rather poor.

² European Research Area

Objectives

International cooperation of higher education institutions and faculty/student mobility both contribute to the higher education quality, through developing competences of faculty and students, who gain better chances of employment. In accordance with the Higher Education Development Strategy in Serbia until 2020 (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia” No.107/2012, in further text ‘Strategy’) it is necessary that following be carried out:

- 1) All institutions of higher education in Serbia should closely cooperate with the relevant EHEA and ERA institutions and follow the activities and trends in the area.
- 2) The institutions of higher education in Serbia should internationalize their activities through offering joint study programmes, international research projects and enabling faculty/student mobility, thus providing for their own development and progress.
- 3) The policy of faculty/student mobility should be based on a variety of measures to ensure financing of mobility, accessibility of infrastructure, full recognition of study results and support during academic studies; efficient administrative procedures concerning visas and other important issues should be adopted to facilitate foreign students’ enrolment in Serbian universities as well as their life in Serbia (health care, accommodation, meals, etc.).
- 4) Mobility should be enabled across the three educational cycles. Mobility options should be created within the structure of study programmes and within joint diploma programmes organized with foreign universities. Also, the institutions of higher education should be obliged to issue the diploma supplement either in English or other foreign language to every student at a minimum cost.
- 5) The policy of mandatory teacher development (through post-doctoral studies) and doctoral students’ study visits to foreign universities should be implemented. Such policy must rely on highly selective criteria and should be adequately financed. Budget funds aimed for grants, prizes and development programmes for faculty/students should be pooled in order to allow for proper and responsible management.
- 6) The programmes (in English or other foreign languages) offered to foreign students should get accredited following the standard procedure, so that inadequate offers by poorly prepared institutions can be avoided. The reputation of Serbian higher education institutions must not be damaged.
- 7) Due to its capacity and quality, Serbian higher education has a potential to attract a large number of students from the neighbouring region, for whom there is no language barrier; in order to develop the potential to a full degree, it is necessary to support, both organization and funds wise, those areas of education in Serbia that are already competitive in the international market, as well as those which are yet to acquire such status.

8) Until the year 2020, specific policies, activities and measures should be formulated and adopted to improve the international competitiveness and visibility of Serbian higher education, which should, in turn, lead Serbia upwards on the credible international and regional quality lists.

2A. Higher Education Structure

The system of higher education in Serbia is structured as two types of studies: academic (that are conducted in three cycles) and professional (conducted in two cycles), so as to ensure higher quality, flexibility and transparency of higher education. Each institution of higher education further elaborates the difference between professional and academic studies by defining learning outcomes, skills and competencies acquired in a particular type of study.

SWOT Analysis Results

Inner strengths

- Well-developed academic studies in a number of education areas.
- Commendable quality of some faculties or departments, as well as high quality of a considerable number of teaching staff.
- Existence of specific international relations sectors both at universities and at the institutions of higher education related to them.

Inner weaknesses

- Insufficient number of joint study programmes with foreign universities.
- Small number of study programmes in English and other foreign languages.
- Insufficient number of agreements bringing foreign visiting teachers to Serbian universities.
- Insufficient number of agreements taking Serbian visiting teachers to foreign universities.

Opportunities

- Organization of Serbian universities should be internally restructured to allow for faculties/departments to design, accredit and conduct joint interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary study programmes and scientific research projects.
- Introduce measures to foster mandatory inter-university cooperation in designing joint master and doctoral study programmes.
- Develop mobility strategy to encompass all aspects of faculty mobility as well as rules for vertical and horizontal mobility of students within the higher education system in order to achieve better flexibility of studies.

2B Accreditation

The accreditation procedure for higher education institutions is regulated by the Higher Education Act (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 76/95, 100/07, 97/08 and 44/10). Accreditation may be applied for by the Ministry, founder of the institution and/or the institution itself. The accreditation procedure is carried out by the Accreditation Committee.

The Accreditation Committee :

- Issues accreditation certificates to institutions of higher education or study programmes.
- Issues warning notes to institutions of higher education or study programmes that fail to fulfil the requirements of quality and set deadline for their fulfilment, after the expiry of which the Committee decides on the application for accreditation.
- Denies the certificate of accreditation if the institution has not fulfilled the requirements.

The institution that has fulfilled the requirements and has obtained legal confirmation will obtain accreditation certificate and work license through the Accreditation Committee. In the accreditation procedure, the Committee establishes whether the institution has or has not fulfilled the necessary requirements.

According to the latest data from the Accreditation Committee from January 2014, no joint programme proposed by higher education institutions has been granted accreditation.

SWOT Analysis Results

Inner strengths

- Developed procedures and rules.
- Cooperation with other agencies from the region and Europe.
- Activities related to continuing improvement of procedures and quality enhancement.

Inner weaknesses

- Frequent changes in admin and technical staff.
- Insufficient staff in quality assurance.
- Assessors occasionally differ strictness wise.

Opportunities

- Designing a framework for qualification.
- Analysis and revision of Higher Education Reform in Serbia.
- Increased support by the state institutions.

Threats

- Lack of compatibility among study programmes.
- Long lasting economic difficulties in the country.
- Rather small academic community in the country.
- Insufficient student mobility.

2C. Financing Higher Education

The current model of higher education financing is regulated by the Regulation of working condition norms and standards for universities and faculties financed from the state budget („Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“ No.15/02, 100/04, 26/05, 38/07 and 11/07), which refers to the previous study system before the introduction of the Bologna principles. **Therefore, it is necessary either to harmonize the Regulation with the new system of studies or completely change the model of financing.**

Funds allocated to individual institutions are determined relative to the number of students enrolling for the first time at the expense of the state budget. Some other factors are also taken into consideration, such as: size of student classes, number of classes, number of teaching staff, building size, number of non-teaching staff. Total amount of funds (represented also by the necessary number of staff) is thus determined, and consequently corrected depending on the real number of staff working at an institution. On the basis of annual balance, a certain amount is transferred monthly to individual institutions, irrespective of whether all members of staff are covered financially. Each institution distributes the amount (and possibly its own resources) and determines the salaries of the employees.

Funds for running costs are determined on the basis of established norms and the annual balance sheets of the institutions of higher education and they participate as a percentage of budget funds in the overall resources of the institution of higher education. Due to the lack of funds, equipment and investment expenses are practically not disbursed by the state budget, although it is obliged by the Regulation to do so.

SWOT Analysis Results

Inner strengths

- Cooperation with international institutions and financing research from the budget and international research projects.

Inner weaknesses

- The current model of financing creates a considerable differences between paying students and those financed by the state budget.

- The financing system is not transparent enough - the public does not know how much education of one student costs at any higher education institution. Students do not know either how much money the state allocates for their education.
- Institutions of higher education, motivated by short term financial benefits, sometimes endanger the quality and efficiency of studies by enrolling too many students or by opening departments all over the country.

Opportunities

- Higher education development strategy provides guidelines for a new model in financing, establishing a strategic objective to reach the European average of relative disbursement for higher education from the public funds by raising it to 1.25% of GDP. All types of resources are covered here – tuition fee, subsidizing student loans and grants, students standard and all other resources disbursed from the budget towards the institutions of higher education to cover running costs and development.
- Transparent breakdown of education costs within education areas and education institutions; introducing the system of dual participation in the education costs, that should be divided between the state and students.
- Beside public funds, foster private source of financing especially from international sources.
- Stimulate higher education to secure part of their funds through collaborative projects with economic subjects and through participation in projects, both at home and internationally.

Threats

- Long term economic difficulties in the Republic of Serbia.
- Low level of funds allocation for higher education from the budget, as well as low level of funds allocation for foreign student grants.
- Organization of doctoral studies is insufficiently developed. The criteria for acceptance of doctoral students into internationally financed research projects are not transparent enough.

3A. Strategy focusing on faculty

One of the objectives of the Higher Education Development Strategy is to increase faculty mobility. It is necessary to simplify administrative procedures for foreign faculty coming to teach in Serbia, as well as to support Serbian faculty visiting EHEA universities either to teach or to participate in programmes of professional development. It is necessary to motivate Serbian faculty to engage in a larger number of international research projects.

3B. Strategy focusing on students

One of the objectives of the Higher Education Development Strategy is to increase student mobility towards foreign universities. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to simplify administrative procedures for foreign students coming to study at Serbian universities by introducing student visas, as well as to support students visiting EHEA universities either for one-semester or year stays. It is also crucial to simplify and speed up recognition of foreign diplomas, in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

3C. Strategy focusing on grants

A well organized system of foreign student grants would contribute to better collaboration between Serbian and foreign universities. The objectives are:

- a) to provide enough adequate accommodation in students' halls of residence and to organize adequate accommodation in private homes through agencies that would guarantee standard quality and prices.
- b) to secure health care services for foreign students.
- c) to provide adequate social facilities for foreign students.
- d) to introduce a centralized register of foreign students at higher education institutions, in order to ensure monitoring their careers later in their domicile countries.
- e) to provide adequate support for foreign students to finish their studies.
- f) to develop services to support increase in foreign student numbers.

Apart from that, an increase in foreign grants would enable more Serbian students to study at foreign universities, which would result in internationally competent students, capable of being active in other cultures and environments.

3D. Strategy focusing on minority groups

The objective is to ensure equal educational opportunities for all ethnic groups in Serbia. However, this objective calls for strategies not only at the level of higher education, but on the level of elementary and secondary education alike.

3E. Procedures for new titles

It is necessary to update and harmonize national classification of professional titles and vocations with those from other countries , as well as to take measures for the lists off titles to be updated more efficiently.

New study programmes are introduced following a legally prescribed procedure.

3E. National organization (e.g. DAAD, EDUFRANCE, British Council)

A national organization of the kind does not exist.