



Draft of the Regional Roadmap

promoting regional policy in higher education and enhancing structural reform in higher education sector in the West Balkan region

to be offered for consideration to the Regional Strategic Forum in Higher Education in Dubrovnik on 26 September 2012

Document history
Initial drafting done at bi-lateral meeting (August 28 th) and by the Core Expert Group of the STREW Tempus Project via electronic communication – August 2012. The Core Expert Group consists of: Higher Education Authority of Ireland, Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Dublin Institute of Technology, University of Stockholm, Middlesex University London, and University of Novi Sad.
For refinement and adoption by the full membership of the STREW consortium at the Regional Strategic Forum in Higher Education in Dubrovnik on 26 September 2012

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Key words: information, innovation, professionalisation and quality

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On 26 September 2012, senior representatives of the Regional HEAs gathered in Dubrovnik on the occasion of a Regional Strategic Forum, organised under the scheme of STREW Tempus Project and Novi Sad Initiative, supported by the Higher Education Authority of Ireland and Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, under the auspices European Commission, UNESCO, Regional Cooperation Council and Central European Initiative, in order to enhance capacity for structural reform in the Region.

Having regard to the rich and diverse regional academic heritage and clear democratic will of governments from the Region to work together in partnership and to further first draft of a strategic regional roadmap has been launched with the aim to:

- **promote** regional policy in higher education
- **encourage** strategic level debate in the Region on higher education issues which will impact on its development
- **foster** a regional 'collective voice' in higher education that resonates regionally, nationally and internationally
- **initiate** regional discussions for exploitation of the strategic opportunities facing the higher education sector

Specifically, through this regional roadmap, participating institutions and government policy agencies set out their commitment and determination to collectively develop and promote the following:

- **advances** in the professionalisation of public governance, management and administration of higher education,
- **exploration** of emerging innovative concepts of teaching and learning by facilitating collaborative action and sharing of good practice in higher education
- **development of new collaborative approaches** to enhance internal quality including the introduction of an external examiner system

The necessity to ensure that higher education institutions are able to respond to European, national and local needs underpinned the Novi Sad initiative and STREWS Project activities. This Regional Roadmap seeks to build upon these initiatives and upon the commitment of governments, higher education institutions and students to the creation of a European Higher Education Area.

Operational plan and method of co-ordination

The objectives outlined above will be pursued through the creation of a **Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education**. This will provide a space to support and facilitate the emergence of a distinctive, valuable and ongoing regional contribution to global developments in higher education. The Regional Platform will be focussed in its work and will adopt key priority themes which will be routinely refreshed as the priorities of the region evolve into the future. Technological advances in the immediate future offer the potential to transform the higher education teaching and learning experience. This illustrates the scale of fundamental change that is imminent and highlights the opportunity available to the region to join the forefront of international developments in higher education. The Open Method of Coordination developed within the educational and social arena of EU policy provides a method of operation that corresponds to the objectives of this initiative. This method fully respects the autonomy of participating countries, institutions and authorities within a transparent and collective endeavour to advance common goals.

In addition to the high level project objectives, the approach is informed by the findings and the issues raised in the **Regional Expert Report** which reflects responses to a comprehensive questionnaire completed by a large number of regional stakeholders. The initial priorities and structure of the platform are as outlined below:



[FOR THE CHART ABOVE – **INFORMATION, INNOVATION, PROFESSIONALISATION AND QUALITY**]

In addition to the achievement of greater co-operation within and between the higher education systems of the region, the Platform has potential to serve as a forum through which higher education systems of the Region can become more firmly engaged with the communities and societies they serve.

Professionalisation of Public Governance and Management

Under this strand, the Regional Platform will promote administrative professional development among senior administrators within higher education institutions and among senior administrators and policy-makers in relevant higher education authorities in the region. This will support the evolution of universities towards genuine internal integration and operational autonomy promoting

- common standards for university procedures
- common university services based on central information system
- introduction of competent and well educated administration across university services
- efficient management with common resources
- establishment of university development fund
- development of the culture of one university voice outside

and will also support strategic development of the higher education sector through the establishment of intermediary agencies to act between universities and the government, with the aim to

- promote subsidiarity and allow long term considerations to inform decisions;
- provide for a separation of functions, ensuring that governments focus on setting national policy while institutions deliver such policies;
- facilitate the detailed steering of the higher education system within a broad policy framework determined by governments;
- bring specific expertise and management capacity to bear which can facilitate strategic development of the higher education sector;
- encourage long term strategic planning of the higher education system;
- safeguard and promote university autonomy;
- limit unnecessary bureaucratic control, interference and micro management;
- limit direct political involvement in higher education institutions and
- limit an inappropriate use of the power of the purse to constrain academic freedom.

Innovation in Teaching and Learning

The key purpose of the Innovation in Teaching and Learning strand will be to provide a platform for academically-led enhancement of the student learning experience and of the quality of higher education across the Region. This will be done through expanded opportunities for high quality academic professional development. Within this strand, the promotion and dissemination of excellent practice can be progressed also through the creation of a competitive funding stream for collaborative and innovative projects and through the establishment of Regional Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Learning with a specific focus on the successful integration of research with teaching and learning.

The External Examiner System

The development of an external examiner system for 1st and 2nd cycle programmes is intended to promote consistently high standards of quality in higher education programmes across the West Balkan region. This development also has significant potential to boost co-operation, deepen understanding, and to enhance the capability of higher education institutions to respond to national expectations and to compete successfully in the international arena.

The role of external examiner system may vary but usually presumes:

- the comparability of the standards of student achievements with those in other higher education institutions
- appropriate academic standards set for its awards, or part thereof
- rigorous assessment processes fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance, ensuring equity of treatment for students,
- periodic assessment of standards of student performance in the programmes or parts of programmes

Documentation Centre

The Documentation Centre is intended to enhance mutual visibility of higher education systems in the Region by exchanging and sharing information. It will thereby serve as a valuable resource for research, policy analysis and policy development throughout the Region and as a focal point for regional experts in higher education.

The Common Will Terms

We, representatives of Higher Education Authorities in the Region acknowledge the common challenges and the value of collective approaches in responding to these challenges. We commit to full and active participation in the Regional Platform which we regard as the vehicle for implementation of this Roadmap. Our ambition is not to imitate developments in other quarters but also to provide fresh initiatives which could constitute a distinctive contribution regionally and globally to higher education.

We, representatives of Higher Education Authorities (HEAs) from the WB Region (full names of HEAs) endorse this Regional Roadmap to foster collaborative solutions and strong partnerships in higher education in the Region and to further develop the interactions at all levels in order to complement and strengthen the present exchanges between senior government, academic and administrative personnel.

In order to foster collaborative solutions and strong partnerships in higher education in the Region We also agree to bring this Roadmap to the attention of European Commission, UNESCO, Regional Cooperation Council, Central European Initiative, European University Association and International Association of Universities.