Annex 2 Suggested approach of the work on national strategies on the social dimension

In time for the next ministerial meeting in 2009 the WG suggests that the countries should report to the BFUG on their national strategies for the social dimension, including action plans and measures to show their impact. All stakeholders concerned should actively participate in and support this work at the national level.

The countries should use the overall objective as a starting point for their work and formulate a strategy in line with national priorities:

We strive for the societal goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of our populations. We therefore pledge to take action to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.

The development of a strategy should be followed by a national action plan that includes monitoring mechanisms. Ideally, the strategy and action plan will be based on a national debate on the social dimension and the future priorities of that country depending on the current situation. In order to facilitate a national debate on the social dimension the WG proposes the following structure and topics for such a debate:

- **Measures to promote equal opportunities**
  What obstacles are there to equal opportunities within higher education? What protection is there if a student is discriminated when applying for, being admitted to or carrying out studies? Is there a framework for appeal? What action would be the most effective to achieve equal opportunities in higher education?

- **Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education for underrepresented groups (gender, ethnic origin, immigration, socio-economic status and background, disability, geography etc.)**
  What groups are under represented in your national higher education system today? Is there data to show access to higher education by gender, socio-economic background, disabilities, prior immigration, region etc?
  What obstacles to widened access and participation are there within your higher education system? At other education levels?
  What actions would be appropriate for the different groups to achieve widened access? Are targeted outreach activities needed?

- **Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience**
  A, Provision of academic services
  B, Provision of social services

  What kind of academic or career guidance is provided for the students in your country? What is the student – staff ratio?
  Are there retention measures adapted to different groups or individuals with different needs? Is the academic success of student tracked? What would be/has proven to be the most efficient retention measures?
  What kind of study environment is there at the higher education institutions? Do student have access to information, electronically or by other means? What is the condition of libraries, lecture halls and seminar rooms?
  How do students in your country live? Is housing available, of acceptable standard and affordable?
  Is targeted support provided or needed for specific student groups?
  Is counselling available if students run in to personal difficulties?

- **Measures to increase formal and actual student influence on and participation in higher education governance and other higher education issues**
  Are there formal provisions for student influence and participation at all governance levels, in consultative as well as decision-making bodies? Are there formal provisions for student evaluation of the education?
  Are the formal regulations followed-up with actual practices? Are there informal ways of student influence and participation as well?
  Do students have an influence on all issues related to higher education?
  Are students aware of their rights? Do students have organisations that can organise elections to fill elective posts? Is it possible to find enough candidates to fill the posts available? If not – how could this be improved?

- **Finances in order to start and complete studies**
  What kind of information and guidance is provided for students regarding financial issues?
  How does the average student make his or her living during studies? What kind of state support is provided? Is it appropriate for all groups and individuals? Do certain groups run the risk of being excluded from, or not able to finish their studies, due to financial reasons? Which are these groups or individuals? What could be done to help them?
  Are students informed about possible employment possibilities after finishing their studies? How is the labour-market relevance of the studies secured? Are former graduates tracked to follow-up their employment rates?

- **Monitoring: The participating countries should establish national measures to monitor and evaluate the impact of the national strategy and action plan.**
  What monitoring mechanisms would be the most appropriate? How could success in strengthening the social dimension be measured short-term and long-term? What quantitative and qualitative data are needed? How is the responsibility for monitoring and evaluation allocated and divided? Are there student surveys carried out to measure the impact of a social dimension strategy? How can student surveys be used in this work?

- **Stakeholder involvement**
  Which stakeholders should be involved in the development of a strategy and an action plan? What should be the responsibility of the different stakeholders when carrying out the agreed strategy and plan?