

Providing policy-makers and practitioners with resources to improve
the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area



PL4SD

peer learning for the
social dimension

Final Report

Armenia

Version: 03 April 2015

www.pl4sd.eu



with the support of the Lifelong Learning
Programme of the European Union

Contact us for further information

Institute of Advanced Studies (IHS)
Stumpergasse 56, 1060 Vienna, Austria
Email address: info@pl4sd.eu
Phone number: +43 1 599 91 133

This report has been written by Dominic Orr and Melinda Szabo in collaboration with the Country Review Experts and members of the PL4SD Consortium mentioned on page 8 of this report.

The Project Consortium



Austria:
Institute for Advanced
Studies Vienna (IHS; coordinator)

Martin Unger
Petra Wejwar
Sarah Zaussinger



Croatia:
Institute for the Development of
Education (IDE)

Thomas Farnell
Ninoslav Šćukanec



Germany:
German Centre for Research on Higher
Education and Science Studies (DZHW)

Dominic Orr
Melinda Szabo



Belgium:
European Students' Union (ESU)

Elisabeth Gehrke
Michael Tolentino
Frederiksen

Glossary	5
1 Introduction	6
1.1 The social dimension of higher education	6
1.2 Structure of the Country Review	7
1.2.1 The external review team.....	7
1.2.2 Background Report	8
1.2.3 Site visit	8
1.2.4 Structure and purpose of the Final Report.....	9
2 Analysis and main findings	10
2.1 Before entry to higher education.....	11
2.1.1 Characteristics of this stage	11
2.1.2 What we have learnt	12
2.1.3 Analysis and reflections	13
2.2 At entry to higher education	15
2.2.1 Characteristics of this stage	15
2.2.2 What we have learnt	15
2.2.3 Analysis and reflections	16
2.3 Study framework.....	17
2.3.1 Characteristics of this stage	17
2.3.2 What we have learnt.....	17
2.3.3 Analysis and reflections	21
2.4 Graduation and transition.....	24
2.4.1 Characteristics of this stage	24
2.4.2 What we have learnt.....	24
2.4.3 Analysis and reflections	25
3 Overarching issues related to a national strategy for the social dimension	26
3.1 Data.....	26

3.2	Initiatives and strategies	27
3.3	Definitions of social inclusion for institutional strategies	27
4	Considerations and recommendations.....	29
4.1	Short term:	29
4.2	Medium term:.....	29
4.3	Long term:	31
	References	32
5	Annex 1 – Schedule of on-site visits, 8 - 12 September 2014	34
6	Annex 2 – Background Report	40

Glossary

Abbreviation	
ANQA	Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance
ANSA	Armenian National Students' Association
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ECTS	European Credit, Transfer and Accumulation System
HEI(s)	Higher Education Institution(s)
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education ¹
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia
NATC	National Admission and Testing Center

¹ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-classification-of-education.aspx>

1 Introduction

The current report presents the analysis and the findings resulting from the national review that was carried out in Armenia in the second half of 2014 as part of the Peer Learning for Social Dimension Project (PL4SD).

Armenia was one of the first countries that opted to participate in the initial series of the PL4SD Country Reviews. The participation of the country has been endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Science in Armenia and has been confirmed by the project Stakeholders' Forum, formed by the members of the BFUG Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning Working Group (2012-2015).

The review was jointly coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) based in Vienna, Austria as leader of the PL4SD project and one of the project partners, the German Centre for Research on Higher Education and Science Studies (DZHW) based in Hanover, Germany.

The PL4SD Country Reviews have the aim of providing an external and comprehensive reflection and review of initiatives and measures undertaken by a country to support the social dimension of higher education. The objective of the review is to assist Armenia in the development of a coherent and effective national strategy for improving the social dimension of higher education.

Furthermore, the Review aims to highlight Armenia as a role model, which wishes to look at its education and especially higher education system from the perspective of improving the social dimension of higher education. Both the project participants and the inviting Ministry are convinced that this type of review can lead to overall improvements in access to and delivery of higher education in the 21st century.

1.1 The social dimension of higher education

Research shows that a combination of three factors tends to determine educational success: student ability, material and immaterial (e.g. social and cultural) resources, and opportunity. In particular, non-academic factors such as social background, financial resources, aspiration, flexible provisions of higher education and study framework conditions (e.g. balance between work and studies) affect participation and success in higher education. Additionally, student ability may have been affected by a person's material and immaterial resources at previous (e.g. secondary) educational levels.

Under the term 'social dimension' the Ministers responsible for higher education in the Bologna signatory countries have committed to improving the inclusiveness of European higher education, in recognition that study frameworks may have to be better diversified in order to assure opportunity for all members of society. The Country Review follows this Ministerial commitment:

In the London Communiqué of May 2007, Ministers responsible for higher education agreed on a common objective for the social dimension: *“that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations”*.

They further emphasised the importance *“of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background”* and to continue their efforts to *“...provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.”*

Ministers also committed themselves to report on their *“... national strategies and policies for the social dimension, including action plans and measures to evaluate their effectiveness”*.

In **Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve** (2009), Ministers pledged to *“...set measurable targets to widen participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the next decade.”*

In **Bucharest** (2012), Ministers agreed to *“...develop a system of voluntary peer learning and reviewing by 2013 in countries which request it and initiate a pilot project to promote peer learning on the social dimension of higher education.”*

The commitments undertaken by the Ministers are based on the arguments of social justice (i.e. attaining educational success regardless of a person’s origin) as well as economic and societal gains (i.e. maximising the talent and potential of individuals).

1.2 Structure of the Country Review

The PL4SD Consortium developed a framework for the Country Reviews that was detailed in the Terms of Reference and was agreed with the Ministry of Education and Science in Armenia. The review process consists of a preparation phase of setting up the external review team and drafting of the Background Report, an implementation phase of developing the schedule for the site visit and the on-site review and the final phase of drafting and finalising the review report.

1.2.1 The external review team

The Country Review was conducted by an international review team consisting of four members of the PL4SD Consortium and three external experts who were selected based on their wide-ranging experience in the assessment of national higher education systems and their understanding of social dimension issues. Collectively their knowledge and experience enables them to sympathise with and comprehend the perspectives of policy-makers, HEI representatives, researchers and students. The external experts were nominated by the PL4SD Consortium and mandated by the Stakeholders’ Forum (consisting of members of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning Working Group of the Bologna Process, 2012-2015).

To establish that there was no known conflict of interest the curriculum vitae of experts was made available to the Armenian Ministry prior to the on-site visit.

The external review team was composed of the following experts.

External reviewers	Position and affiliation
Jan Sadlak	President, IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence
Maria Kristin Gylfadottir	Erasmus+ Programme Manager in Iceland (education and sport)
Koen Gever	PhD-Researcher at European University Institute
Martin Unger	Project Leader, PL4SD Senior Researcher, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS)
Dominic Orr	Country Review Coordinator, PL4SD Senior Researcher, Centre for Research on Higher Education and Science Studies (DZHW)
Petra Wejwar	PL4SD Consortium Researcher, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS)
Melinda Szabo	Country Review, PL4SD Expert, Centre for Research on Higher Education and Science Studies (DZHW)

1.2.2 Background Report

The Background Report was developed two months prior to the site visit. The report was based on a predefined template following a series of guiding questions. A number of supporting documents were collected from the Bologna National reporting exercise, studies carried out by Eurydice, Eurostudent, Eurostat, the Eurypedia database as well as other materials provided by the Armenian Ministry. In addition, any information provided by Armenia on measures for improving the social dimension of higher education was also included in the report.

The Background Report was sent for further consultation to the Armenian contact persons and used to prepare the on-site visit and the Final Review report. An updated and elaborated version of this Background Report is provided in Annex 2 to this report.

1.2.3 Site visit

The site visit took place between 8-12 September 2014. The Armenian contact persons assisted the review team with the logistics and coordination of the site visit. An outline of the site visit schedule was developed by the review team and finalised by the national contact person (see Annex 1).

During the five-day visit, the review team interviewed approximately 80 individuals, separately or in groups. Discussions were held with representatives of the government and

Ministry of Education, with representatives of the student union (ANSA), with the quality assurance agency (ANQA) employers union (Union of Employers in Armenia), international organisations (World Bank Yerevan Office, DAAD, Open Society Foundation), the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat, representatives from the general secondary education and middle vocational education, representatives from the admission centre (NATC), with members of the opposition political party and researchers (i.e. Eurostudent National Coordinator). The review team also conducted interviews ‘on location’ at a state and private university in Yerevan, namely at the Yerevan State University, Yerevan State Linguistic University and Armenian Northern University. Outside the capital, the review team visited higher education institutions at Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute and Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute and engaged in discussion with its representatives and local stakeholder groups (i.e. regional council, representative from secondary schools).

The review team would like to thank the contact person for the support provided in organising the site visit and for facilitating the research and documentation process. The review team is also grateful to the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science for its hospitality and openness and to everyone who participated and provided reviewers with helpful insights into the social dimension issues of the Armenian higher education.

1.2.4 Structure and purpose of the Final Report

The Final Report draws together the analysis in the Background Report (Annex 2) and the review team’s observations during the on-site visit.

The Background Report covers the main features of the Armenian education system (history, national context, general organisational framework and mechanisms and some central statistics). In order to grasp the issues that can affect the accessibility and fairness of the higher education system in Armenia at various stages of the education system, the Background Report is structured into four sections: before entry to higher education, at entry, study framework and graduation and transition. This structure is repeated in the Final Report. The reviewers have considered both academic and non-academic factors that can affect the learning opportunities and success of students particularly, the underrepresented groups.

For each of these four stages, the report details the main findings, highlighting what the reviewers have observed and learnt about the Armenian higher education system and then provides an analysis of these findings with a reflection on possible future action. The main aim of this report is not to recommend singular actions, but to facilitate Armenia in its efforts to see the whole picture concerning the social dimension of higher education and to use this insight to create a national strategy or an action plan for improvement. To this aim the report closes with key recommendations arising from the four preceding chapters.

2 Analysis and main findings

In the sense of a preamble, there are a number of context facts, which should be borne in mind, when considering an analysis of the social dimension of higher education in Armenia. At the same time, they provide a justification for looking to improvements in the inclusiveness and quality of higher education in Armenia.

Economic situation²

The Republic of Armenia has undergone an intensive transformation of its economy since independence at the start of the 1990s and in the early 2000s it had an average annual growth of around 13%. However, the country was severely impacted by the global economic crisis in 2008. This has affected educational spending in three ways. Firstly, it has reduced public spending on education, which also fell relative to GDP and has not yet fully recovered. Secondly, the financial crisis impacted on the internal market and led to an increased difficulty for private households to afford the private costs of participation in education, especially the fees for preparing for and participation in higher education. This is because subsequent economic growth (7.2% in 2012, 3.5 % in 2013 and 2.7% in the first half of 2014) has not been sufficient to decrease the poverty rate to pre-2008 levels. In 2012 (last year available) every third person in Armenia was statistically defined as poor. Thirdly, the Armenian diaspora pay remittances to their relatives who remain in Armenia. Remittances are generally expected to have positive impacts on decreasing poverty and are frequently used to pay for education. These are also likely to have declined post-2008, as many people in other regions of the world (in the case of Armenia, especially Russia) have been also affected by the financial crisis. This situation has increased the pressure on the education sector to keep total funding sustainable, but equally to increase efforts to keep higher education participation and attainment affordable for all.

Labour market³

Armenia has a labour market largely based on the fields agriculture and forestry (c. 39% of labour market) and services (c. 45%). This may account for the fact that higher education provision has struggled to meet the current labour market demand. In 2011, higher education graduates had an unemployment rate slightly higher than the general population (19.5% vs. 18.4%), whilst those with lower qualifications had a lower unemployment rate. Albeit the share of the population with higher qualifications that is economically active (i.e. registered in the official labour market) is well above the average for the former group (70.1% vs. 58% according to the census of 2011). Furthermore, in 2012 (last year available) one change became visible which speaks explicitly for the benefits of higher education qualifications: whilst the average unemployment rate dropped from 18.4% to 17.3% between 2011 and 2012, the rate of unemployment of those with only vocational training rose in the same period from 17.8% to 24.9%. This may signify an effect also seen in other countries – that newly created jobs require a new set of skills that can be either provided by

² This topic is treated in more depth in the Background Report, Section 1.2.

³ This topic is treated in more depth in the Background Report, Sections 1.3.-1.4.

a vocational specialisation or a higher education qualifications. This all supports the argument that attending higher education does have a clear impact on employment opportunities in Armenia. It also suggests that the education system may benefit from finding ways to retrain those with lower qualifications by encouraging them to enter tertiary education later in life. This argument is also relevant when looking at the average age of the unemployed in Armenia which is 42 years. Again finding ways of helping these people to enter the tertiary education sector for further training could lead to further positive impacts on the labour market. At the same time, the experts heard of high unemployment levels for higher education graduates at the present. This suggests that a closer link between industry needs and tertiary education provision is necessary.

Reforms in education sectors

The Armenian education sector, including higher education, has been subject to many reforms during the past decade (i.e. national qualification framework, financing strategy for universities, student mobility, quality assurance etc.). Some of these reforms have not yet been implemented and some may require further tweaks for improvement before their full effect becomes visible. These reform initiatives, which will be mentioned in the relevant sectors below, show that the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science has recognised problems and is involved in the mobilisation of funds and initiatives with the aim of improving the inclusiveness and quality of higher education.

2.1 Before entry to higher education

2.1.1 Characteristics of this stage

This stage can generally be characterised as a qualifying and decision-making stage for students. The pre-tertiary level of the education system presents certain routes that will facilitate entry to higher education to prospective students. At the same time, completion of a lower level of education will lead to exiting this level and therefore entails a decision on the part of the learner as to whether he/she wants to, aspires to or can enter higher education. This is likely to be taken on the basis of expected exit qualifications, the expected costs and benefits of entering higher education and the alternatives. An important characteristic is also the type of education a person is following, as it might be relevant in determining the chances to enter higher education (e.g. different opportunities for graduates of general education schools and vocational schools). In many cases, research has shown that, in general, students from underrepresented groups are more pessimistic about the options regarding participating in higher education. For this reason, one of the main goals for improving the equality of opportunities and the inclusivity of higher education is to make special efforts to prepare prospective students beforehand, providing them with information about the available options and raising their aspirations.

2.1.2 What we have learnt⁴

Armenia has focused much attention on improving its secondary education system and aligning it to international standards (spending around half of all public expenditure in this sector). Recognising that teachers were being paid well below the average monthly wage in Armenia, there have been efforts to increase teachers' salaries. Whilst they were at only 42% of the average national wage in 1993, they were raised to 68% of the national wage in 2005, they continued to rise in 2007 (Unicef, 2008) and the experts were informed that raising secondary teachers' wages is a priority in the current public budget.

In 2001 a reform of the secondary school structure began with the goal of providing 12 years of compulsory schooling. In 2001 it was extended by one year to 11 years and in 2006 to 12 years. In 2010 a new school form was introduced alongside the middle school and vocational school (largely in urban areas and especially in Yerevan) for a more focused academic training and a more direct route into higher education. The school is named the high school; there are currently 102 high schools in urban areas and 7 in rural areas.

Nevertheless, there are in fact three routes into higher education. Pupils can obtain a secondary school-leaving certificate (*Mijnakarg Yndbanur Krtoutian Attestat*), which allows the holder to apply for a place in higher education, through graduating from a general education secondary school (named the middle school), a vocational college or a high school. Regarding the vocational college, the experts were informed that around one quarter of pupils take a combined course ending with a vocational training and an academic leaving certificate (called the *matura*). In accordance with their respective missions and profiles, high schools are the preferred route to higher education, whilst HEIs cannot accept more than 10% of graduates from vocational colleges. This makes high schools somewhat contentious since they are not evenly spread across the country. Indeed, this development is considered to have widened the opportunity gap between children from rural and urban areas.

On a more general level, the access to well-trained teachers is more evenly spread across the country. It is estimated that 91% of teachers have a formal teaching qualification (Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, 2012, p. 25) and a recent survey found pupils relatively satisfied with their teachers (Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, 2012, p. 27). Both the average qualification level and the satisfaction of pupils was slightly higher outside of Yerevan. At the same time, two factors suggest that HEIs, on the one hand, and parents, on the other, are dissatisfied with the performance of many schools. Regarding the former, many HEIs have joint ventures or own their own schools (six HEIs); these schools operate then as "feeders" for these specific institutions. Regarding the latter, there is a prevalence of private tutoring in Armenian secondary education, which suggests that parents do not trust that the education offered in secondary schools will ensure their children access to higher education and possibly a scholarship. In discussions with students and teachers the

⁴ More background information on the education system is provided in the Background Report, Section 3.1.

existence of private tutoring appeared to be a controversial matter on policy level, but more a matter-of-fact for current students.

2.1.3 Analysis and reflections

In this section we focused on the role of the Armenian secondary school system in providing fair and transparent opportunities for all to qualify for higher education studies. The analysis reflects research done as part of the Background Report and observations of the expert team during the visit in Armenia. These show that the government is making considerable efforts, under somewhat difficult circumstances, to improve the secondary school system in order to enhance both the quality of secondary education across the country and pupils' preparedness for entering higher education.

From this perspective, the introduction of high schools in 2010 can be seen as an initiative to support in particular high performing pupils rather than increasing opportunities for all to access higher education. The current problem with this provision is the unequal distribution of these schools throughout the country, making them hard to reach for people living in rural areas, which is around one third of the population in Armenia. Careful monitoring of the socio-demographic characteristics of the pupils attending high schools is recommended so that initiatives can be undertaken to assure that the only criteria determining access to these schools is excellence and subject knowledge (and not, for instance, where people live).

It is also positive to note that there is a vocational route into higher education. This provides a kind of second chance, for those who may have chosen or been selected for the vocational track in upper secondary schooling. It is important to note that these students often have had a different educational preparation and different motivations than other students and may require additional support, if they are to succeed in their studies.⁵

A special issue is the private tutoring. In recent years, private tutoring seems to have become an almost universal phenomenon in Armenia. However, it should be noted that during interviews with different stakeholders it became apparent that private tutoring is neither a new phenomenon, nor specific to Armenia. A recent study for the European Commission stated: “Although tutoring often exists because the mainstream system is weak, other forces are also pertinent. Some countries have well-developed systems, but experience strong demand for tutoring fuelled by competition and examination-based learning” (Bray, 2011, p. 7). In Armenia, it could be the case, however, that both reasons come together – the worry about the quality of secondary schooling and concern about reaching sufficient points to pass the university entrance examination. In Box 1 this topic is discussed in some depth. It is strongly recommended that there should be an open and transparent discussion with all relevant stakeholders in Armenian education on private tutoring with the possible consequence that it is accepted as a part of the education system

⁵ For instance the “What works compendium of effective practice” coordinated by Prof. Liz Thomas (https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/what-works-student-retention/Compendium_Effective_Practice): (Charlesworth, 2010)

itself. It is further important that the government monitors the socio-demographic background of those who make use of this extra support and to consider what alternatives can be offered to those who cannot afford tutoring. During the visit we heard examples of additional support being offered by schools outside of normal school hours.

Box 1: Private tutoring in Armenia

Policy approaches as well as actual practices concerning access routes to higher education is one of the key elements of social dimension analysis. In this context, looking at existing practices used by pupils to increase their chances of success in reaching a university place is important. One of the mechanisms for such assurance is private tutoring in selected academic subjects. This practice takes place particularly in systems in which there is excess of demand for higher education and a highly competitive university entry examination. Both conditions are present in Armenia. Additionally, present day Armenian society considers a university degree more than confirmation of higher education studies with high private rates of return on the labour market. A university education also provides a prestigious position in society for the individual and family. It might even have an influence on private life of an individual such as marriage.

A comprehensive analysis of private tutoring related to preparing for higher education in Armenia has not been found. There is also no official data about the cost of private tutoring in Armenia. However, in the course of discussions during the site visit, frequency of reference to private tutoring allows the experts to draw the conclusion that it is a widespread practise. In this regard the Armenian case is not different from other jurisdictions as private supplementary teaching is usually beyond the official data-collecting systems. The prices heard for this service range from 1,000 to 2,000 US dollars per student for a given subject. Thus, private tutoring expenditures are a very significant item in the budgets of many households. It should be pointed out that extra and private tutoring commonly creates and perpetuates social inequalities, and it consumes human and financial resources which could be used more appropriately and effectively in other activities. However, making use of private tutoring in order to prepare for an entry examination test is seen by many as an insurance and a family obligation.

When considering the economic implications of private tutoring in Armenia, it is also important not to neglect the fact that providing such educational services represents a significant source of income for individual teachers or academics (and is therefore indirectly related to their concerns about wages). Neither can the possible learning benefit of such extra-teaching services be neglected, as it can represent a mechanism through which potential students extend their knowledge and are psychologically better equipped for undertaking entry tests and future studies. It is not particularly surprising to learn that most of private tutoring is given in mathematics, natural sciences as well as Armenian and foreign languages.

Recommendations

Despite official claims that regular school curriculum gives sufficient knowledge for successful passing of the university entry test, it is rather unlikely that private tutoring will disappear any time soon. Therefore policy responses should be focused on:

- monitoring and active approach in order to secure data on size, forms and impact on higher education, especially from the point of view of the social dimension;
- introducing recommendations against excessive fees, number of students as well engagement of teachers in providing such services;
- improving the quality of teaching in the upper secondary system in Armenia to decrease the demand for private tutoring;
- encouraging diversification of providers and organization of tutoring by promotion of use of digital technology, organization of teaching by HEIs in the form of summer schools, evening courses, etc.

2.2 At entry to higher education

2.2.1 Characteristics of this stage

This stage is characterised as the selection stage of the higher education system. The entrance stage should ideally provide equal access opportunities to all prospective students. However, in most countries participation and representation rates of different societal groups are uneven, in particular when referring to groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities or when it comes to the choices of study fields for women and men. For this reason, the social dimension goal is to widen access, especially for these groups.

In order to understand this stage and its impacts it is therefore important to look at the general entry requirements for all groups of students. Second chance routes are of particular interest as well, as these routes include remedial support to help prospective students, including mature learners, who have not followed the typical path to higher education entry.

2.2.2 What we have learnt⁶

Entrance to higher education is regulated by success on the central examination, which is administered by National Assessment and Testing Center. The Center was founded in 2004 and started administering the tests in 2008. The aim was to provide a unified, objective and more transparent selection mechanism for higher education entry. The tests for each subject are offered on the same day in testing centres across the country. The questions are multiple choice, which has the advantage of assuring a high objectivity and enabling applicants to see their scores at the end of the day of examination. The results of the tests are used in Armenia to set a threshold score for access to higher education and to assign free places to the top share of students in the subject areas for which free places are available. For this reason, the test can be termed high-stakes. Such high-stakes examinations are often controversial, but they are often used as a selection mechanism and can be shown to have the expected effects (Sackett, Borneman, & Connelly, 2008).

In a presentation by the World Bank, which was prepared by the Deputy Minister for Education and Science in Armenia, a remaining challenge is highlighted: namely that this type of testing goes against the new teaching and learning strategy for schooling, which highlights more problem-based and learner-centred pedagogy (Harutyunyan, 2013). This was an issue mentioned to the experts during the site visit, when they visited a Pedagogical University responsible for the training of teachers. They complained that both teacher trainees and teachers were insufficiently informed about the tests and highlighted the problem that many teachers were not informed or trained well enough to ensure pupil success in the tests. As also mentioned in the aforementioned presentation, high-stakes testing, which is common in many countries as a way of regulating entrance to higher

⁶ More background information on the education system is provided in the Background Report, Section 3.1.1.

education, could be one of the reasons for the prevalence of private tutoring (see Box 1 above), especially if the results of the test are not directly connected to grades achieved at school level. In a meeting with the Ministry for Education and Science, the experts heard that a draft strategy document exists, which plans to make a tighter connection between grades achieved in secondary school and the final results of the tests. If implemented properly, this could help to join what is learnt at school level and what is learnt for the examination. It remains unclear, however, how the two systems might be integrated.⁷

The analysis of participation in Armenian higher education shows a strong bias to people from high socio-economic backgrounds. Two studies, cited in an unpublished ministerial paper, confirm this. Whilst the overall enrolment rate of Armenians aged 18 to 22 is 37%, it lies at 44% for non-poor families, 25% for poor families and 10% for extremely poor families. The analysis of the Integrated Living Household Survey presented in the Background Report also suggests that this situation has become worse for the very poor over the past two decades. In contrast, the (absolute) participation of those classified as poor has grown in parallel to those classified as non-poor over this period, while relative equity between the groups has not improved over time. Looking at parents' highest educational attainment shows similar trends of persisting participative disparity, although it appears that all social groups (defined by highest educational attainment of parents) have profited quantitatively from increased participation.

2.2.3 Analysis and reflections

Discussions with students, HEI leaders and other stakeholders in Armenian higher education demonstrated that the central entry-level examination is widely accepted and seen as transparent and fair by most. The main discussion on this topic was had with teacher trainers, who worried about the disjoint between teachers' training, what teachers are expected to be teaching and the requirements for scoring well in the central examination.

The questions most relevant from the perspective of the social dimension are whether all pupils have equal chances to score well in the central test and whether there are alternative routes into higher education for those who do not achieve the required points in the test.

Contrasting participation rates by financial characteristics of families (being classified as poor) with social characteristics (being classified by highest educational attainment of parents) suggests that being economically poor has become particularly disadvantageous in Armenia despite the overall expansion in enrolment in higher education. This is likely related to the fact that support at secondary school level and access to higher education requires significant financial costs (such as private tutoring fees to prepare for entry into higher education and tuition fees at tertiary level). Whilst recognising that these problems are to a certain extent inherent in a low-income country, it would be important to know, whether the need for private tutoring in order to pass the entrance examination is further

⁷ Examples of such connections can be found in Estonia and Poland, for instance. For brief description Estonia see: http://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/higher_education_system_2013.pdf

exacerbating the situation. It should be noted that the demographic decline in the number of young people (as potential students) is leading to a drop in the required score in order to enter tertiary education. This leads to a somewhat lowering of the stakes of the actual test. The question of the connection between participation of young people from poor backgrounds, access to good schools and access to support for success in the central examination cannot be answered on the basis of the information obtained either during the site visit or afterwards. It is recommended that this question is further investigated by national researchers. This is especially important since the Armenian higher education system does not offer alternative routes into higher education for those, who do not do well on the central examination.

2.3 Study framework

2.3.1 Characteristics of this stage

This stage is characterised by the progression towards the successful completion of studies within the higher education system. A central goal of the social dimension is to ensure the retention and the learning progress of students regardless of their social and economic background. This ultimately means on the one hand providing qualitative student support services such as academic and career counselling and enabling a certain flexibility of study progress, and on the other hand ensuring direct support in the form of grants to achieve this objective. These are therefore important aspects, which the experts looked at during the site visits.

2.3.2 What we have learnt⁸

Three key issues for looking at this area are: firstly, how are HEIs funded? This is relevant for understanding the importance of fee income for the HEIs, which is directly related to the second question on what costs students have to bear to complete higher education studies and how they are supported through student aid. Thirdly, it is important to understand the organisation of study programmes and how students progress through them.

Funding of HEIs

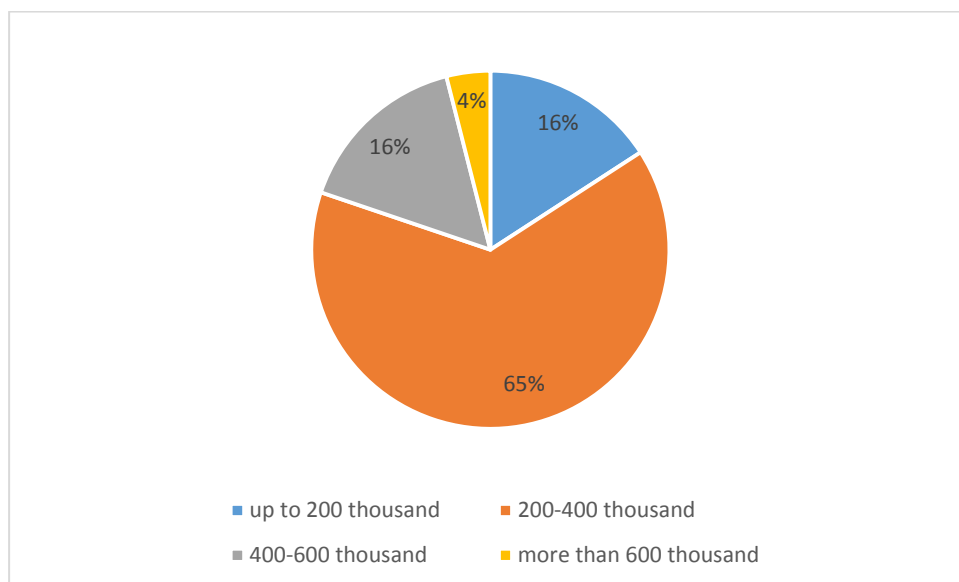
According to the experts' meeting with the Rectors' Conference at Yerevan State University, the state grant to HEIs makes up around 20% of HEIs' total income. In the case of Yerevan State University, this share is higher at around 25% while at some regional colleges, this share will be much lower. In the case of a selected few HEIs, other sources can increase the share of state-funded revenue, especially funding for scientific projects and research. HEIs further try to increase their incomes through paid services for industry and also through European funding for projects.

⁸ More background information on the education system is provided in the Background Report, Section 3.2.

However, in the case of smaller universities and colleges, between 80% and 95% of institutional revenue is raised through tuition fees. This makes HEIs very vulnerable to changes in student numbers and the decrease in the total number of students in recent years has hit some HEIs hard. In one case, the experts heard that the HEI had coped with the financial pressures by reducing salaries directly and by asking other personnel to work more hours for the same salary – and in this extra time to attempt to raise additional project-based funding.

A share of the tuition fee income is covered by the state through state-funded places. These make up around 15% of all student places and are prioritized for particular subject areas. These normed allocations per student lie at around 1000 € irrespective of subject area, so that HEIs have to use this funding for places in some fields to cross-subsidise the costs of places in other (more expensive) subject areas. The fees paid by students are currently not regulated centrally and can be set autonomously by the HEIs. This has recently caused problems as many HEIs have raised their fees and the government was not able to control this development. At the same time, the experts were informed by rectors that the current state funding is too low and they consider that higher fees are needed. Currently there is a consultation on both the methods used for calculating the normed costs, paid by the state, and on the possibility of the government setting maximum fees. Figure 1 shows the fee amounts according to an internal ministerial paper, which was presented to the experts during the visit.

Figure 1: Tuition fee rates per semester (1.00 EUR = 576 AMD), 2014



Source: internal ministerial paper, 2014

In order to increase the number of free places in the higher education system and to encourage HEIs to use their income to support students, a new law in 2014 requires HEIs to keep back 7% of their tuition fee income and use this to provide free places. This means that in any one year, around 22% of student places are non-fee paying places. Almost all of these non-fee paying places are re-allocated each year inside of the HEI largely on the basis

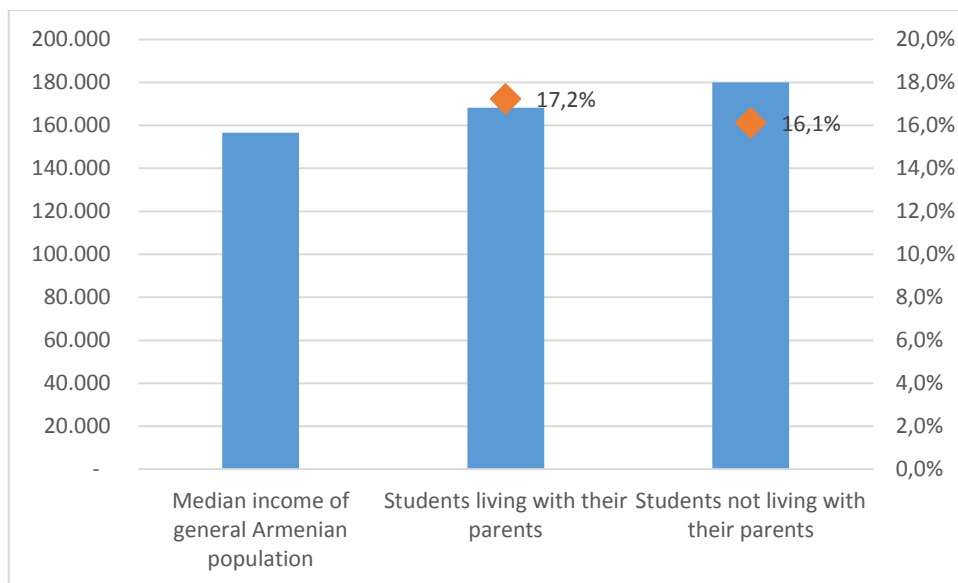
of academic merit. At Yerevan State University the experts were told that around 40% of students rotate (from fee to paying places and vice versa) after the first year and around 20% after the second year.

Student costs and financial support

Student costs are made up of living costs and tuition fees. Fees are high, but compared to the general Armenian population, the income of the students surveyed in the EUROSTUDENT project is also high. This may be a function of the social exclusivity of the higher education system, but also the high remittances students receive from relations living in foreign countries. Figure 2 shows the comparative monthly income of the general population in Armenia, and of students living with their parents and not living with their parents. Taking the average tuition fee (according to the new EUROSTUDENT data), it is shown that the fees constitute 16% to 17% of the average student's income.

Whilst these figures look positive, they also hide the dire situation of around 20% of the student population have a monthly income that lies at around half of the median student income, i.e. one fifth of the student population could be classified as very poor, following poverty definitions used in Western Europe.

Figure 2: Average monthly income of students in Armenia (DRAM) and share of income spent on average on fees (in %)



Source: EUROSTUDENT V data set and Armenian agency for national statistics.

The accounts of students met by the experts confirm that the fees are considered as very high. If the fees cannot be paid by relations living abroad, parents struggle to cover the costs. Parents may take up extra jobs or move abroad for work in order to pay for their children's education, often in poor labour conditions. Moreover, students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face additional costs, such as housing and transportation costs that have risen in recent years, particularly in the urban areas where most HEIs are located. During the site visits, the experts encountered very little support to students from

disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e. transportation, meal subsidies, counselling etc.) aside from the limited number of scholarships, which is available for all students.

The provision of direct financial support for students is currently very low, but this has been recognised by the government. As described in the Background Report, a grant scheme is in place since 2013 and which provides a new type of support to students, whose parents are classified according to administrative statistics as financially vulnerable. In the latter case, around 1500 students (less than 2% of the student population) have received support, which is largely used to discount the fees they pay. It is planned to double this number in 2015. The experts have also learned that the interest rates for student loans are rather high (10 to 20%), thus not representing a very attractive measure in particular for students from low-income groups who are more debt-averse.

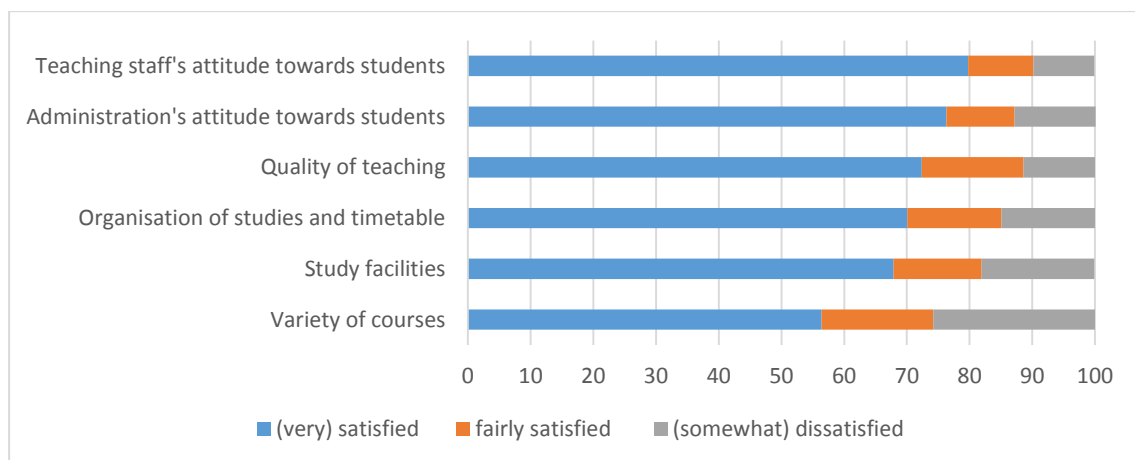
A higher number of students receive some kind of stipend, albeit at a low level and very often based solely on the criteria of merit (scholastic performance at school or during the first years of higher education) – around 10,000 students receive a stipend of about 6,000 AMD (c. 10 €) per month. The EUROSTUDENT figures suggest that taken together student support makes up around 5% of an average student's income.

Overall the experts saw that there are other grants and scholarships available apart from the government ones, but discussions also suggested that information about these is fragmented and not transparent. This makes it hard for students to find the ones for which they would best qualify.

Study progress and success

According to the new EUROSTUDENT data, students are satisfied with many aspects of their studies. Most dissatisfaction is expressed in regard to the variety of courses, infrastructure, and the organisation of studies and timetable.

Figure 3: Student satisfaction with various aspects of studies (in %)



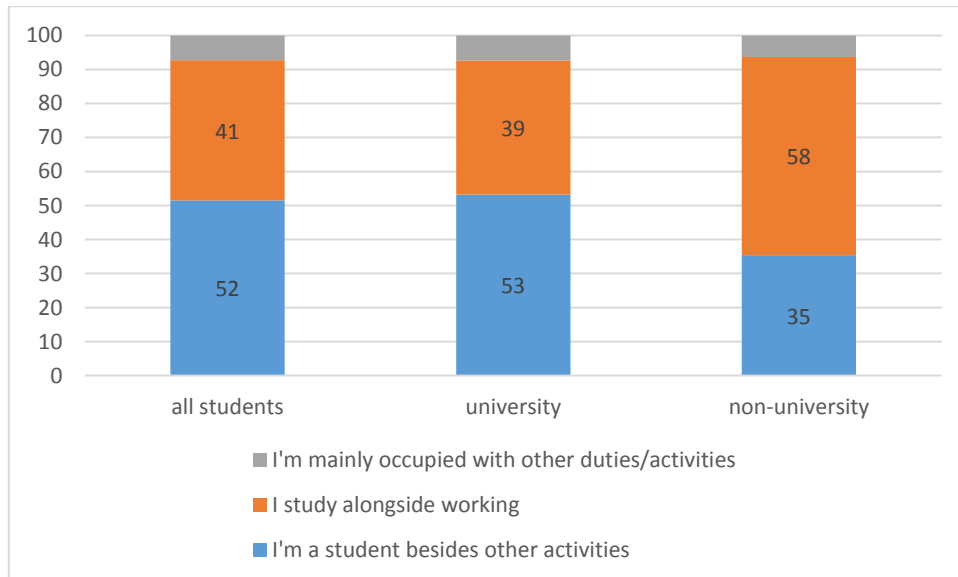
Source: EUROSTUDENT V data set.

In the context of the social dimension, however, the organisation of studies and timetable is important, as it should allow some flexibility for students, who are working alongside

their studies. The Armenian higher education structure is quite strict in this sense, since students on full-time courses are expected to attend all courses full-time. They also want to score well in the mid- and end-of-term exams since for at least one fifth of the students these are high-stakes examinations, by which they could gain or lose a free study place.

In discussions at the HEIs outside of the capital, the experts heard that the programmes of study are sometimes offered in a more flexible format for students, who cannot attend all lessons. This appears to be an informal arrangement, which is easier to arrive at in small institutions. However, the EUROSTUDENT data suggests more flexibility may be sensible, especially in the regional HEIs. It shows that the share of students, who agree to the statement “I study alongside working” is much higher in the colleges of higher education (non-universities) with nearly three-fifths of all students agreeing. However, even for universities the share is relatively high at two-fifths – see Figure 4.

Figure 4: Focus of students' weekly activities - studying and/or working (in %)



Source: EUROSTUDENT V data set.

A further point relevant to progress and success in higher education, especially from the social dimension perspective, is whether students are offered support and counselling. The experts were told that if this were offered by HEIs, it was not done on a systematic manner, but rather offered by the individual lectures or professors. This response was heard both from HEI leadership and from students, but it appeared not to be seen as a deficit.

2.3.3 Analysis and reflections

Taking into consideration the current level of economic prosperity, higher education in Armenia is expensive for most of participants. In many cases the cost of participation is supported through students' relations living in the diaspora. This is likely the reason why the average Armenian student has a monthly income, which is higher than the average

Armenian's income on the labour market. A large share of this income is necessary to cover the costs of tuition fees. For those students who manage to raise income to this average level or higher, this is unlikely to present large affordability problems. At the same time, the data presented also showed that one fifth of students have an income which is below half of this average and they are very likely to be financially challenged.

One way of alleviating these costs is to gain a fee-free study place. Indeed once students arrive in their course, the study framework can also be classed as high-stakes for those who feel they have a chance at receiving one of the fee-free study places. Whilst only 15% of students will start their course on a fee-free place (state-funded places) based on merit criteria, this rises to something around 22% (i.e. including the places offered by the HEIs). Additionally, as noted previously there are many opportunities for students to receive a tuition discount, a grant, stipend or loan from one of the many sources, which may contribute to reducing their costs. However, the experts felt that this system is too fragmented, which makes it difficult to monitor and adjust the support offered to different categories of underrepresented groups.

The government recognises the problem that not enough students receive sufficient support, especially the fact that the largest part of support is allocated on the basis of merit. However, the limited public money currently allocated to higher education in Armenia means that this source of support will remain low. Requiring HEIs to put aside part of their tuition fee income is one way to increase the amount of support available to disadvantaged students and from this perspective the policy can be welcomed. However, HEIs argue that they also have a problem, with this, as it is difficult for them to raise sufficient income for quality operations and this is why they would like to raise the fees.

From the perspective of the social dimension, a second issue related to the allocation of fee-free and paying study places is the rotation model. Whilst it is clear what logic is behind this mechanism, which restarts the competition for free places each year and in so doing gives every student the chance to obtain a free place each time, the rotation system can be questioned as it is likely that it causes turbulence and stress to students, which is unfavourable for their studies. To the knowledge of the experts, this aspect of the rotation system has not been investigated.

The experts recommend that Armenian stakeholders review the importance they give to rewarding merit at entry to and within the higher education system. With such little financial support available, it may be worth considering reallocating a large part of this support to those students for whom participating in higher education presents a financial challenge. One scenario to start considerations is described in Box 2.

Box 2 – Rethinking the allocation of scarce financial support

The experts recommend rethinking the allocation of scarce financial support by other criteria than merit. Indeed, bringing all three challenging aspects together – tuition fees, student support and turbulence during studies – it would be possible to think of a different scenario. In this scenario all students would pay at least a minimum fee, and part of the income from the fees would be used to provide poor students with sufficient funding to pay their tuition fees and for an additional stipend for living costs.

The first sticking point for this scenario is the recognition of the counterfactual: what would happen if merit-based support would no longer be available? Most likely, very little would change in the behaviour of students nor in the level of entry into higher education. Thus, we can conclude that the financial support now does not go to the marginal student: the students who receive support would continue their studies even in the absence of such support. Other criteria are needed to allocate student support, based on need.

A second sticking point would surely be that students would no longer be rewarded financially for studying hard, as in the current case with merit-based free places and merit-based stipends and grants. However, pass rates are usually the main instrument for recognising good performance and these would still be given on the basis of examinations and assessments. The free places do not have to be given only on the basis of socio-economic criteria. Minimum threshold pass rates could be required. However, there would be no competition for these places.

A third sticking point would be how to coordinate the criteria used by the HEIs to allocate free places and additional support. In England and Wales this is regulated through a “watch dog” called the Office for Fair Access¹, which requires all HEIs charging fees which are higher than the minimum to publish an action plan detailing how they propose to utilise a share of their tuition fee income (around 25%) to support students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

A final sticking point is that the government would then no longer be able to determine the share of study places offered in subject areas considered important for the economy (as it does currently through the state-funded places). However, this might be done through other means such as target agreements between the government and HEIs (either collectively or individually).

2.4 Graduation and transition

2.4.1 Characteristics of this stage

The graduation and transition stage is characterised as the move into the labour market or further educational training. Successfully offering a more inclusive higher education system necessitates consideration of what happens after completion of a course of study.

2.4.2 What we have learnt

As highlighted in the Background Report youth unemployment in Armenia is high and has averaged around 40% since 2009. This fact was mentioned as a problem by almost all interview partners in Armenia during the experts' visit. In connection with higher education, there is a recognition that this has to do with the hard economic climate since the financial crisis in 2008, but that a better interaction between the higher education system and the labour market could also lead to improvements.

Various initiatives are being undertaken in order to improve the knowledge about the labour market needs and graduates' success on the labour market, which can feed into the design and evaluation of study programmes and counselling of students during their study progression. The experts were informed that the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) has set down a requirement that HEIs counsel their students on the opportunities for work before they graduate. They additionally heard that many Bachelor-level study programmes have a practical period towards the end of the programme so that students can gain experience in the labour market.

Of particular interest is a larger project, which is supported by the EU's TEMPUS/Erasmus Plus funding programme. The project entitled Higher Education Network for Human Capital Assessment and Graduate Employability in Armenia (HEN-GEAR) runs from October 2012 until October 2015.⁹ Eight Armenian universities take part in this project, which is coordinated by the AlmaLaurea network from Italy. The goals of the project are to collect and analyse data on where graduates from different HEIs progress to after completing their studies, thereby also facilitating the placement of graduates on the labour market in the future. In one of the universities visited, which takes part in this project, a career centre has been set up to further support students' transition into the labour market. A further member of the project consortium is the Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen in Armenia. Their participation would seem particularly important, since the representatives of employer, who the experts met during the week, emphasised three specific problems in the labour market, which also hamper students' transition into good quality jobs after graduation. They are: the short-term view of employers' needs, only weak linkages between schools, HEIs and the labour market and – perhaps as a result of this – the lack of innovation in business.

⁹ <http://www.hen-gear.net/>

2.4.3 Analysis and reflections

The transition into the labour market is an important concluding step for most students who enter higher education. However, both the expansion and differentiation of the higher education system, which has occurred in Armenia over the past two decades, makes a closer interaction between HEIs and the business world necessary, so that both sides can better discuss the supply and demand of highly educated graduates. The high unemployment rate of young people makes this interaction especially important, since higher education can be seen as a way towards further economic growth and recovery for Armenia. At the same time, the low level of public and the high level of private investment in higher education in Armenia means that students and their families are carrying a large part of the risk for a successful transition into the labour market.

A smart policy mix must be used to help assure the best possible transition into the labour market. The interaction between the policy instruments of funding of special initiatives in this area, which also comes from the EU, and the installation of soft governance mechanisms in the form of student-focussed guidelines within the national accreditation system, which ANQA is establishing, and research data on where higher education graduates end up going, is very positive. Whilst welcoming the HEN-GEAR project, the experts would like to highlight that – as with all such projects – the question is how such an initiative will become sustainable after the project has finished and how the work of the project can be scaled up to include all HEIs in Armenia.

3 Overarching issues related to a national strategy for the social dimension

3.1 Data

Currently, the availability of data is limited for Armenian higher education. More detailed and comprehensive data could be used to support new policy-making and strategy development on all levels of the system. However, it has been noted by the experts that the Armenian government and other stakeholders have recently been taking action in this area. During discussions, the experts heard about the ensuing release of the “Tertiary Education Management Information System” (TEMIS). Through this system, educational institutions throughout the country, including regional ones, will be able to collect and report educational performance data, thereby improving the quality, transparency, and monitoring of the Armenia’s tertiary education system. Furthermore, the participation in the EUROSTUDENT project provides more qualitative information on students’ social and economic background and student life in Armenian higher education. Additionally, the National Assessment and Testing Center has valuable information on student application patterns and student success in obtaining a place in a specific HEI. The combination of these sources of data should facilitate more substantive discussions on how to improve higher education in Armenia from the perspective of the social dimension and would be greatly welcomed by the experts. Box 3 provides some ideas on what kind of data governments can collect from the perspective of the social dimension.

Box 3: Data on the social background of university students

In recent years, several governments (e.g. the United Kingdom, the Netherlands) have developed data systems on the population of higher education students. The idea is that governments now wish to maintain a record of each individual student, rather than aggregate figures about trends. These data are usually collected at the entry point (by admissions services) as well as at the beginning of each academic year for re-enrolment through the universities. Because data is usually collected at the entry to higher education anyway, these do not impose a big cost on the government or on the universities. The importance of such systems is that they allow policy-makers and universities to correlate various aspects of academic performance (e.g. the accumulation of credits, time-to-degree, the enrolment in higher level degree programmes, etc.) with a large number of aspects of students’ life. Typically, students are asked to provide data on relevant determinants of academic success such as:

- The region where they are born and where they lived during childhood;
- Academic ability, such as previous test scores, high school information;
- Information on the parental home (i.e. parental level of education, parental occupational class, parental home ownership, siblings in education, etc.);
- Personal demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, etc.
- University information, such as field of study, type of degree, full-time or part-time studies, level of tuition fees, etc.

Having such data would allow Armenian policy-makers to have a better overview over who succeeds and who struggles in Armenian universities. Moreover, it would allow policy-makers to ask a number of questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the school and the university system.

3.2 Initiatives and strategies

The experts noted during the site visit that many new policy initiatives and strategies are currently being enacted in Armenia, with the aim of improving and modernizing the education system at different levels. This work is welcomed. In many instances when the experts asked about a certain issue the response was that reform was happening in the mentioned area, which means that the national or local governing bodies have taken measures to address these matters. A typical challenge in a system exposed to so many simultaneous changes and reforms is to keep actors on all levels informed and involved in the process of designing and implementing the changes. In this context, the experts heard frequently during their discussions that the participative element of the reform process is somewhat lacking. One example is the concern of teacher trainers and teachers in secondary schools that they had been too little involved in the design and implementation of the national testing scheme for higher education entry and were therefore unsure how this new selective layer in the system related to the normal work of teachers in secondary schools. A second example was that students are generally not well informed on changes leading some students to question current policies without fully understanding them. Another example is that at the presentation of a new career centre at one of the HEIs it appeared unclear to the Rector how the career centre was related to the general processes of teaching and learning at the HEI. Whilst this is a typical challenge in many countries, this deficit in Armenian policy-making has been noted before by Karakhanyan et al. (Karakhanyan, Veen, & Bergen, 2011). The challenge is made greater by the fact that a large number of the reforms have been implemented as projects via the TEMPUS/Erasmus+ and were led by persons not resident in Armenia and without plans to sustain the outcomes of the projects. The experts note positively the current strategy of the head of the TEMPUS/Erasmus+ office in Armenia to encourage Armenian academics to lead such projects. This can also contribute to a better connection between the various initiatives already in place and a better understanding of the contextual issues of educational reform in Armenia.

3.3 Definitions of social inclusion for institutional strategies

The experts were told that the new law for higher education from 2014 now clearly classifies underrepresented groups as those with a disability, those who are orphans, children of war veterans or disabled parents or children of families classified as financially vulnerable. Such a broad classification is welcomed. At the same time, it is important that there is a clear specification for national and institutional levels of what type of problems are associated with educational access, participation and progress for each of these groups and how each group can be supported in order to successfully complete their higher education course.

Whilst this is important for national policy, it is also important that HEIs have their own strategy related to the diversification of their student body, since each HEI is likely to be presented with different issues related to different student groups attending or wanting to

attend its courses. Especially in the context of discussions in the HEIs, the experts did not have the impression that an inclusion strategy with the aim to accommodate a diversified student body exists at present. To adequately represent the composition of Armenian society, the experts recommend that HEIs set themselves an inclusion strategy. There are two existing examples of such work, which might provide inspiration for the Armenian situation. On the one hand, there is the Index for Inclusion from the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Riddell, 2012) – although it is focused on schooling, it could be adapted for higher education as well. It has been translated and adapted for use in many countries across the world.¹⁰ Besides highlighting areas which may need attention, it poses provoking questions which are designed to help individual institutions design its own strategies. Another example are guidelines for Croatian HEIs for supporting disabled students. These guidelines – in a similar manner to the Index for Inclusion – walk the reader through the various issues and possibilities for support.¹¹

One important area of work is the gender dimension. For instance the experts heard that there is a strong expectation that boys do not become teachers. Similarly, there is little understanding or support for pregnant students or students with children. Students therefore face the choice to delay childbearing or to face an additional hurdle on the road to academic success.

The strong social norms of Armenian society are also reflected in the higher education environment. While there has been talk about inclusive education more dialogue appears to be necessary in general society about contentious issues such as sexual orientation. Higher education could play an important role in facilitating such dialogue and fostering cultural plurality.

¹⁰ <http://indexforinclusion.org/>

¹¹ This Tempus-funded project was called “Education for Equal Opportunities at Croatian Universities (Eduquality)”

4 Considerations and recommendations

Strengthening the social dimension of higher education cannot be done within the education system alone. Achieving the aims of the social dimension depends on developing a “joined-up approach” by successfully engaging different societal actors and direct stakeholders and by using the right steering and planning mechanism. A joined-up approach for integrating the social dimension of higher education more visibly into the Armenian education system can be set up within Armenian’s development of a national strategy for education based on the four stages covered in this report. The strategy should follow a national debate with all stakeholders of the education system and should be followed through by using transparent monitoring mechanisms.

To this aim the peer reviewers have formulated a number of recommendations below based on the reflection of interviews carried out during the site visit and the background analysis carried out prior to the visit:

4.1 Short term:

Gather data on the social background of pupils and students in current data initiatives.

The best way of understanding how elements of the educational system effect different student groups is to collect data in anticipation of key policy questions such as how inclusive and effective is the education system. This means, for instance, collecting data on students’ parents. Using existing practices of data collection (such as at registration for the central entrance examination or at enrolment to studies) has the advantage of limited additional costs. Surveys, which are not so regularly carried out, can then be used to collect additional data, which is not collected on a regular basis through the administrative system.

Develop benchmarks on the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education.

The participation of several groups could be boosted if the government sets benchmarks on national and institutional level for the participation of particular groups of students currently either non-present or only enrolled in higher education in very small numbers. Since the new law on higher education already mentions certain underrepresented groups, a benchmark of achievement could be set for any of these groups.

4.2 Medium term:

Development of the student support system which is less fragmented and based on identified needs, rather than on demonstrated ability.

Currently, most of the student support goes to those who would be able to enter higher education even in the absence of such support. This is a waste of scarce resources. The money would be better spent on the marginal student: those students who would like to (continue to) go to university but cannot because of financial or other constraints (e.g. disability, students with children etc.). The student support system could also be widened to include indirect support for accommodation, transport, counselling and other student services. Although some of these areas are remit of HEIs and regions, a national strategy for the development and integration of student services could be used to join them up and make them more transparent to all, especially those who are supposed to benefit from them.

Develop an integrated strategy to decrease demand for private tutoring at secondary school level.

Private tutoring should be accepted as part of the current education system and efforts made to reduce demand for this service. While some efforts have been undertaken in the most recent reforms of the secondary school level with the introduction of the high school, more can be done about both supply and demand. On the supply side, more transparency is needed about the costs of private tutoring for Armenian families. On the demand side, students should be better prepared for the national tests by the schools themselves.

Recognise the sustainability and effectiveness of the higher education funding system from the perspective of the HEIs and the students.

This issue is likely to remain tricky, since funding from both public budgets and private households is very scarce. However, it seems that the current system is not optimally configured. HEIs are keen to assure their sustainability by increasing fees and high fees are putting high pressures on students and their families. Additionally the turbulence caused by the rotation between paying fees and receiving state-funded places may be negative for student progression. There are no quick fixes here, but higher education funding appears to be a major issue.

Review policy-making and implementation processes.

This recommendation can be given to any country, which is subject to multiple reforms. For them to enfold their full impact it is important to assure that: (i) data and evidence is available and used well for policy development and evaluation and (ii) the policy-making and implementation process is as inclusion as possible. Many actors and stakeholders of Armenian education, such as teachers on secondary level, higher education teachers and students, as well as labour market actors, feel little ownership of recent policies made by the government and this effects the implementation of the potential of such policies. This could be addressed by including more critical voices in the elaboration and the implementation of policies.

4.3 Long term:

Foster equality of educational opportunity for all by careful examination of social norms.

Improving the social dimension of students life entails also the cultivation of a cultural understanding and a positive recognition of differences in terms of gender (male, female) identity (sexual, political and religious) and belonging (socio-economic background). In the long-term it is desirable that higher education does not reflect social norms, but becomes a role model for other parts of society in these respects.

References

- ANQA / World Bank. (2014). *Guidelines, criteria and standards for quality assurance in the Armenian tertiary education*. Retrieved from <http://www.anqa.am/am/Portals/0/%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%BF.pdf>
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2002). *Index for inclusion developing learning and participation in schools*. (M. Vaughan, Ed.). CSIE.
- Bray, M. (2011). *The challenge of shadow education - private tutoring and its implications for policy makers in the European Union*. European Commission.
- Charlesworth, J. (2010). *Supporting transitions into and through higher education*. Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/WYLLN_Supporting_transitions_into_and_through_HE.pdf
- Harutyunyan, K. (2013). Improving Education Quality through Stronger Student Assessment Systems - Republic of Armenia. In *World Bank Symposium - Assessment for Global Learning*. Retrieved from [http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Event/education/Armenia/Presentation with Note.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Event/education/Armenia/Presentation%20with%20Note.pdf)
- Karakhanyan, S., Veen, K. van, & Bergen, T. (2011). Educational Policy Diffusion and Transfer: The Case of Armenia. *Higher Education Policy*, 24(1), 53–83. doi:10.1057/hep.2010.25
- Riddell, S. (2012). *Education and disability / special needs*. European Commission. Retrieved from <http://www.nesetweb.eu/sites/default/files/NESSE-disability-special-needs-report-2012.pdf>
- Sackett, P. R., Borneman, M. J., & Connelly, B. S. (2008). High stakes testing in higher education and employment: appraising the evidence for validity and fairness. *The American Psychologist*, 63(4), 215–27. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.63.4.215
- Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis. (2012). *Access to School Education in Armenia*. Open Society Foundation. Retrieved from http://tcpa.aua.am/files/2012/07/Access-to-School-Education-Report_-Final.pdf
- Unicef. (2008). *Country Profile - Education in Armenia* (pp. 1–4). Unicef. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Armenia.pdf>

5 Annex 1 – Schedule of on-site visits, 8 - 12 September 2014

Day	Description of activities	Who is invited?	Proposed participants	Time	Meeting Place
8 September	Meetings and discussions on broad issues in social dimension from a national perspective (30-60 minutes each)	Individual interview sessions with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative of the government & ministry; • National union of student (ANSA); • Rectors' conferences (president, spokesperson of working group related to social dimension); • Representative of student affairs on national level (where does a student go for advice and support?); • National representative/authority for students with disabilities; • Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance (ANQA). 	Meeting with the representatives of Republican Union of Employers of Armenia (Shushanik Barseghyan, Sergey Chibukhchyan, Anush Khachatryan)	9:30-10:15	26a Movses Khorenatsi street, 0010, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia
			National union of student (ANSA) - Sargis Asatriants, Vice-Chair of ANSA	10:30-11:30	Yerevan, Vardanants St. Passage, 8 Building, 4th Floor, Room 416
			Rectors' conferences (president, spokesperson of working group related to social dimension) – Aram Simonyan, Head of Rectors' council	12:00-13:00	Yerevan, Alek Manukyan 1, Yerevan State University
			Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance (ANQA)- Ruben Topchyan, Director of the ANQA	14:00-14:45	22 Orbeli Street Yerevan, 0028, Armenia,
			Representative of the government & ministry – Armen Ashotyan, Minister of Education and Science	15:00-15:45	Yerevan, Main Avenue, Governmental House 3, Ministry of Education and Science
			National representative/authority for students with disabilities – Representative from the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs	16:00-16:45	Yerevan, Main Avenue, Governmental House 3, Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs
			Discussion of the Background report	17:00-18:00	Yerevan, Main Avenue, Governmental House 3, Ministry of Education and Science

9 September	Group meetings addressing the following: 1. How do access routes to HE work in practice? (outreach, normal routes, alternative routes, special programmes/initiatives, advice and counselling, what makes an application successful); 2. What issues cause problems for retention and success? (monitoring of issues, initiatives to deal with the issue); 3. How are students supported in HEIs? What kind of support do they receive, do they need? (who provides support, who uses support, who does not); Cross-topic: focus on the “underrepresented” groups and the specific	Possible attendees recommended by the international coordination team: I. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative from the National Admission and Testing Center (NATC); • Representative from the central matura exam (general and vocational track); • Representative from the general secondary education and middle vocational education; II. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative organization for student affairs; • Student(s) from rural areas, scholarship recipient(s); 	Meeting with Anush Shahverdyan, Representative of the World Bank Yerevan Office	9:15-9:50	9, Grigor Lousavorich Street, 6-th floor
			Group meeting 1 Representative from the National Admission and Testing Center (NATC); Representative from the central matura exam (general and vocational track)– Arsen Baghdasaryan Representative from the general secondary education and middle vocational education – Syuzanna Makyan, MOES, Robert Abrahamyan, MOES	10:00-11:30	Center for Education Projects PIU, Yerevan S. Vratsyan 73
			Group meeting 2 Representative organization for student affairs – representative from ANSA Student(s) from rural areas, scholarship recipient(s) –2-4 students from different marzes and receiving scholarships	11:30-13:00	Center for Education Projects PIU, Yerevan S. Vratsyan 73

	support they need.				
	<p>Site visit at two universities in Yerevan</p> <p>The PL4SD team will be addressing issues regarding the diversity and representation of the student body in that region (e.g. also ethnic mix), smaller HEIs may have less support structures (but they may be better known), working alongside studies to finance studies, etc.</p>	<p>Possible attendees recommended by the international coordination team from a state and private university (separate meetings):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of a university (rector, vice-rector, students, counselling office, etc); • Institution’s financing departments/councils (how is the budget allocated, what does it cover?); • Special student groups, e.g. scholarship recipients, people from under-represented groups; 	<p>First site visit – Yerevan State Linguistic University</p> <p>Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representatives of a university (rector, vice-rector, students, counselling office, etc); - Institution’s financing departments/councils (how is the budget allocated, what does it cover?); - Special student groups, e.g. scholarship recipients, people from under-represented groups; 	14:30-16:00	Armenia, 375002, Yerevan, # 42 St. Toumanyar
			<p>Second site visit – Armenian Northern University, participants - Representatives of a university (rector, vice-rector, students, counselling office, etc); Institution’s financing departments/councils (how is the budget allocated, what does it cover?); Special student groups, e.g. scholarship recipients, people from under-represented groups;</p>	16:30-18:00	15 Alek Manukyan St, Yerevan
10 September	<p>Site visits outside the capital (two different</p>	<p>Possible attendees recommended by the international coordination</p>	<p>First site visit – Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute – participants - Representatives of a university</p>	11:00-13:00	P.Sevak 4, Gyumri 3126, Armenia, (+374 312) 6 94 94

	<p>locations if time allows) The PL4SD team will be addressing regional issues, e.g. diversity and representation of the student body in that region, smaller HEIs may have less support structures (but they may be better known), working alongside studies to finance studies, etc.</p>	<p>team: HEI(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of a university (rector, vice-rector, students, counselling office, etc) • Institution’s financing departments/councils. • Special student groups, e.g. scholarship recipients, people from under-represented groups; <p>Regional stakeholder groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional labour market office; • Regional development office/regional council; • Representative from a Secondary School (director, spokesperson, teachers); • Representatives of interest groups from underrepresented groups; 	<p>(rector, vice-rector, students, counselling office, etc); Institution’s financing departments/councils. Special student groups, e.g. scholarship recipients, people from under- represented groups;</p> <p>Regional stakeholder groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional labour market office; • Regional development office/regional council; • Representative from a Secondary School (director, spokesperson, teachers); <p>Representatives of interest groups from underrepresented groups;</p> <p>Second site visit – Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute - participants - Representatives of a university (rector, vice-rector, students, counselling office, etc); Institution’s financing departments/councils. Special student groups, e.g. scholarship recipients, people from under- represented groups;</p> <p>Regional stakeholder groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional labour market office; • Regional development office/regional council; • Representative from a Secondary School (director, spokesperson, teachers); <p>Representatives of interest groups from underrepresented groups;</p>		
				15:30-17:30	Vanadzor, Tigran Mets str. 36, Armenia

11 September	Meetings and discussions: The PL4SD team will meet with organizations, stakeholder groups and researchers who are active in the higher education sector. The meetings will help clarify and better understand all the information and impressions the team has acquired from earlier discussions.	Individual interview sessions with: - Representatives from the Center for Education Projects - Representatives from the Open Society Foundation - The Bologna Secretariat - NTO-Armenia representative - DAAD representatives - Researchers (e.g. Eurostudent analysts) - Representative from the opposition political party. - Other possible organisations/people with an interest in social dimension issues.	Representatives from the Center for Education Projects – Hasmik Ghazaryan, Director of CFEP	10:15-11:00	Yerevan, S. Vratsyan str., 73,
			The Bologna Secretariat - Gayane Harutyunyan, Head of Bologna Secretariat	11:15-12:15	Yerevan, S. Vratsyan str., 73.
			Representatives from the Open Society Foundation – Larisa Minasyan, Director of OSF Armenia	12:30-13:30	OSF-Armenia, 7/1 Cul-de-sac # 2 off Tumanian Street, 0002 Yerevan
			Researchers (e.g. Eurostudent analysts) – Lusine Fljyan, Eurostudent National Coordinator	14:30-15:30	Armenia, 375002, Yerevan, # 42 St. Toumanyann
			DAAD representatives - Tine Laufer, Director	16:00-16:45	82 Sarmen St. Yerevan 0019 Armenia
			Representative from the opposition political party –Tevan Poghosyan, Member of the National Assembly from the Heritage party	17:00-17:45	International Center for Human Development 19 Sayat Nova Ave., Yerevan 0001, Armenia
			NTO-Armenia representative – Lana Karlova, Director of NTO-Armenia	18:00-18:45	82 Sarmen Str., 0019 Yerevan, Armenia
12 September	First half day: Open session to meet stakeholders who couldn't reach the expert team during the week. Second half day: Closing the site visit with an oral presentation and discussion of the major	First half day: - Stakeholder who haven't had the chance to discuss with the PL4SD review team - Armenian contact person	Discussion at the Ministry of Education and Science to sum up the results of the visit – Participants – Armenian Contact Person for PL4SD Tatevik Gharibyan, Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of RA	11:00-13:00	Yerevan, Main Avenue, Governmental House 3, Ministry of Education and Science

	issues with the national policy-makers involved in the review possible ending with a press conference.				
--	--	--	--	--	--

6 Annex 2 – Background Report

[separate document]