MoES' Working Group Meeting with the WG
Summary
27 January 2022

Introduction

The World Bank Team facilitated a discussion of a draft project report based on a presentation that summarized the key findings from the stakeholder consultation and a proposal for a reform of the academic careers in Latvia.

The proposal sketched out a roadmap based on the following four principles and four possible scenarios:

1. Four main principles: (a) Strengthen the role of full-time staff, (b) reconsider the role of the election process, (c) strengthen the role of information-based steering and management of academic work and careers (Ministry and HEIs) and (d) facilitate staff mobility.

2. Four possible scenarios: (a) A full and comprehensive implementation in all institutions; (b) a phased implementation via pilots (that would be evaluated); (c) an incremental implementation without additional funding; (d) an incremental implementation with additional funding, based on customized institutional plans. The World Bank team recommend pilots that would be evaluated (Option B) with additional funding as explained in Option D.

Discussion

Working Group members raised the following issues during the discussion:

1. Practical aspects of the pilot phase such as:

   - What kind of budget is needed for those units volunteering for a pilot?

   - What should be the optimal size of the unit piloting the new framework?

   - What is being piloted (tenure track)? Within what timeframe? What aspects could be evaluated in a such short time frame (e.g., recruitment, negotiating the contract, performance evaluation)? There is a need to test a few aspects within a very limited timeframe (2 years).

   - Evaluation of the pilots:

     - What should be the scale, at national level, of the pilot that would allow a credible evaluation (How many people, how many units)?

- Should it be based on quantitative or qualitative data?

- What should be the success factors and how to measure them? For instance, number of applicants per position, number of international applicants, do the institutions have concrete career plans (recruitment processes, performance, the nature of the staff contracts and balance between teaching and research)?

- Should all the indicators be the same for all the universities?

- What happens to staff who have been recruited during the pilot phase if the pilot is evaluated negatively?

The World Bank team recommends to the Ministry a stakeholder consultation about these points. There should be a national framework and a clear vision of the kind of system Latvia wants to promote. This would help decide on these indicators. It will be important to develop the indicators with an eye on the diversity of institutions and disciplines. This would allow each institution to develop its specific pilot plans in line with its strategic orientation. Therefore, the World Bank team recommends that the future "concept note" that Latvia plans to develop addresses the critical aspects of the pilots before they are started.

2. Questions regarding the following policies and principles:

- Additional funding is necessary for any significant reform: this should be made very clear from the beginning.

- The mobility should be both incoming and outgoing: the language policy limits both the incoming mobility and the internationalization of the system. This is essential for enhancing the quality of the system.

- How a collegial process (and an international dimension) can be preserved for recruitment while (some?) elections are replaced by other mechanisms (considering that the governance is being reformed and some elections are eliminated)

- The importance of having a core of full-time staff and how to implement this in the current context where funding comes from two sources (teaching/research): how will it be implemented within one staff contract?

- How many different academic titles could a small country support?

- The importance of data collection

- The scenarios should be associated to SWOTs to help policymakers.

The Working Group requested that the draft report is more direct and forceful with respect to these policies, including the language policy. The roadmap should include the elements that are the most consensual.

3. Review Annex 2 (on the doctorate) and clarify the role of the HEA in the Irish example (Annex 3).

Conclusion

The next draft of the report will be reviewed in the light of this discussion.