Report from session 2 - Student centered learning

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Good afternoon to all the participants and speakers of the bologna process 20th anniversary. I would like to thank you all for a very productive and energetic discussions today. My name is Borna Nemet and I will present the key conclusions of the student-centered learning round table.

There were 4 key panelists of the round table:

- **Terry Maguire**, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, Director
- **Gohar Hovhannisyan**, ESU – European Students' Union, Executive Committee member
- **Karolyn McDonnell**, Institute of Technology in Carlow, Researcher
- **Ann Katherine Isaacs**, BFUG Vice-chair

Facilitator was **Eigirdas Sarkanas**, a colleague of mine from ESU.

Student-centered learning nowadays, is a prominent concept within the European higher education area where students learn best when they are engaged, supported, challenged and encouraged by individuals around them.

Terry Maguire presented the collaborative work of The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Ireland and The Union of Students of Ireland. Working in close partnership with those who learn, teach and shape policy and practice in Irish higher education, the National Forum puts teaching and learning at the center of sectoral enhancement and innovation. Students are clear about the need for learning opportunities to be relevant to the real world and to move beyond the traditional classroom to maximize their learning. If learning in higher education is to be impactful, such learning must stretch beyond existing knowledge and skills and enable students to learn both about themselves and others and

about the nature of learning. A student-centered approach negotiated in partnership provides a solid platform for enhancement of student centered learning.

Only by working all together we can produce and implement SCL at the national level. In order for it to be successful it is crucial to stop looking at the students as the second level academic citizens. To work on a proactive development of SCL it is important to support both, the students and those who teach. Engagement will not simply happen by itself, we have to build that partnership, which is of course, not easy. Enhancement requires patience and partnership in order to be productive at the end. Care, time and help is what students value the most and see as the key in the facilitation of SCL. Active partnership and engagement with students are the key element for enabling students to influence teaching and Learning policy and practice at a national level.

Furthermore, **Gohar Hovhannisyan** points out that SCL is a key priority in the advocacy work of the European Students' Union. Several surveys and projects were conducted by the European Students' Union which surveyed student representatives across Europe on how they perceive the level of implementation of SCL. Even though SCL is included in a variety of policy documents at the European level, it is often poorly understood in those policies, resulting in the lack of concrete changes in practice. Also, there is a confusion regarding the SCL approach, resulting in many problems on a practical, everyday level of the university life, because different stakeholders, or even same groups of stakeholders in different parts of institutions, can have different expectations of what a shift to SCL can bring. Student involvement on the SCL on the national level is lacking and at a very low rate, whereas SCL still does not appear to be a part of our reality. There is a huge misconception within students creating frustrations with stakeholders. We must be aware that not every student is ready for SCL and also that students need to have a proper preparation in order to be able to study within SCL. According to students, the perception about implementation of SCL is still not very concise. More than half of the respondents in a research from 39 EU countries confirm SCL in rather formal or not implemented in the curricula, meaning the lack of interest and involvement. Learning outcomes are not clearly defined resulting in

uncomprehensive learning process. Quality assurance in SCL through the bologna process shows that it is predominantly not present which has to be changed.

Karolyn McDonnell presented a key recommendation to enhance the potential of student-centered learning and student partnership by appointing students to actively moderate the discussions in the digital space, thus eliminating the need for teachers to assume the leadership role for large groups. It is necessary that courses design and assessment that incorporate students as partners in this way facilitates flexible student-centered participation and maximizes the potential of digital technologies to enhance digital skills and connection, involving the sustainable development. It is important in SCL to have a partnership approach within student-teacher communication. The importance of feedback is crucial to get validation and shows weak points but also it is time consuming. The attention is put on what would SCL look like in the future? It has to be flexible and open to questions.   Also, there is a visible impetus on SCL through innovation and improved teaching quality. Staff are supported to introduce innovative teaching methods and encouraged to disseminate and share best practice experience. SCL focuses on active participation of learners supporting and encouraging each other towards deeper learning and meaningful discussion.

Ann Katherine Isaacs discussed the current discourse on SCL which is rather skeptical. Student is a central factor and has to be at the center of learning. Student-centered, competence-based learning is a guiding principle for many who are engaged in the actual practice of learning, teaching and/or assessment. Our competences are rapidly changing in the modern world and for that reason we need new ways of forming competences to deal with these problems. SCL is a center of higher education area and should be used to produce meaningful dialogue. SCL appears explicitly in the more recent Bologna documents; but it was present a long time before. Its connections with the Bologna 'Key Commitments' make it central to the European Higher Education Area, although its implementation is still problematic, and it is often still perceived as wholly or in part outside of the responsibility of ministries. The necessary competences to students can be only given by lowering barriers, creating the common framework and using the European credit transfer system, which is student centered with the idea to allow students to be

mobile and part-take different learning experiences and to be facilitated by the agreed qualifications framework.

To sum up, what about the future of SCL? Should it become flexible, open to questions or brought to the global dialogue? As we work to define the goals for the next 10 years, it is important to remember the original inspiration for the Bologna Process; and now I will quote Katharine Issacs:" If this is understood as we suggest, as facilitating flexible, individual and informed choices of students of all ages and backgrounds, it can be a meaningful theme for ongoing discussion with other higher education areas because It is in our hands and it is our primary mission, within the next decade, to detect and successfully overcome all misconceptions that we are facing right now.