

MEETING OF THE BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP LISBON, 2-3 OCTOBER 2007

Outcome of Proceedings

Participants

See list in annex

Welcome and introduction to the meeting

Prof. Sebastião Feyo de Azevedo, Chair of the BFUG welcomed the participants and presented the Co-Chair, Prof. José Cardoso and the representative of the General Directorate for Higher Education, Ms Alexandra Delgado. The Chair thanked the Benelux Secretariat for the continued support received and in particular for all the careful and very effective preparation of the meeting.

About 90 delegates from 43 countries and participating organisations had registered for the meeting. Apologies were received from Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Switzerland.

1. Adoption of the agenda

Documents: BFUG (PT) 12_1a [draft agenda]
BFUG (PT) 12_1b [draft annotated agenda]

The agenda was accepted with a slight change in order: the vote on the representation of 5 countries as observers to the European QA Register Committee was taken as first item on day two. Expressions of interest had to be communicated to the Secretariat before the end of the coffee break, day one. An address by the Director-General for Higher Education on behalf of the Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education was planned at the end of day one.

2. Minutes of the last BFUG and Board meetings

Documents: BFUG (PT) 12_2a [BFUG 11 minutes]
BFUG (PT) 12_2b [Board 15 minutes]

Minutes of last BFUG meeting, Berlin, 17-18 April 2007 were approved.

BFUG took note of the minutes of the Bologna Board meeting, Lisbon, 30-31 August 2007.

3. Information by the Portuguese Presidency

- The Chair stressed Portugal's full commitment to the Bologna Process. In the national implementation priority is given to the knowledge triangle (higher education, research, and innovation), social cohesion and mobility. Legislative reform has taken place, including in the field of quality assurance and the promotion of the student-centred approach.

- The celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Erasmus programme will take place in Lisbon on 4-5 October 2007. At this conference the social dimension will be highlighted. The Presidency would like to take the same topic on board at the next EU Education Council, 15-16 November.

- San Marino, which is a signatory country of the European Cultural Convention and therefore eligible for joining the Bologna Process, gave a pre-notification of its intention to apply in the near future. BFUG will have to decide at a later stage on a deadline for applications.

4. Information by the Bologna Secretariat

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_4 [ToR Secretariat]

Marlies Leegwater, Head of the Secretariat, introduced her team.

An updated document with the terms of reference for the Bologna Secretariat, as already approved for the previous Norwegian and UK Secretariats, was approved.

Comments regarding the website, especially on the information on countries and organisations that are part of the Bologna Process are still welcome, by preference via e-mail to secr@bologna2009benelux.org.

5. Reflections after the London Ministerial conference

Rachel Green (UK) presented some reflections from the experience of hosting the London conference. The fact that clear objectives were set out in advance for the conference, was a key factor for success. The London conference introduced the novelty of organising panels, which moreover included participants from outside Europe. These panel sessions received positive response. Also the conference setup with space for exhibitions by stakeholders was seen as a positive point.

UK advised the next host to foresee an amount of time and effort for logistical matters in the planning, to reserve opportunity for bilateral discussions in the premises of the meeting (also in the context of the Communiqué discussion) and to make sure that the different Chairs of the Ministerial meeting (Presidency and hosts) get acquainted with each other well in advance.

The Chair thanked the previous UK Secretariat and host of the Ministerial conference for their excellent work.

BFUG members were invited to communicate their recommendations for the next Ministerial meeting to the Benelux Secretariat by e-mail before the end of October.

6. Work programme 2007-2009

Documents: BFUG (PT) 12_6a [draft work programme]
BFUG (PT) 12_6b [proposed seminars and WGs]

6.1 General issues

Documents: BFUG (PT) 12_6.1a [criteria for Bologna seminars]
BFUG (PT) 12_6.1b [WG terms of reference]

The BFUG opts for an integrated approach to the Bologna work programme based on the principles of coordination between different action lines and geographical balance.

The timing was agreed allowing sufficient spreading of the different actions and seminars across the entire period from October 2007 to January 2009.

The reporting schedule was adopted for the different working groups, in which draft conclusions will be available by 15 January 2009.

The BFUG took note of the updated document on Bologna seminars (criteria for inclusion in the Bologna work programme and guidelines for reporting) and the template of the terms of reference for Bologna working groups.

It is important that 1 contact person for each proposed group is designated and that the coordinates of this contact person are communicated to the Secretariat as soon as possible for sake of liaison. Working and coordination groups should make sure to provide an update of their activities two weeks in advance of each BFUG meeting and their minutes should be made available by the Secretariat in the restricted section of the Bologna website.

Chairs may provide more background material for participants to the group.

It should be observed that keeping the deadline for reporting will require serious effort of both working groups and BFUG members as this will entail timely reporting at national level.

The terminology on the different sorts of BFUG groups should be clarified and agreed on by the BFUG.

As all groups are supposed to network with each other, their number should remain manageable.

6.2 Mobility

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_6.2 [EI and ESU mobility campaign]

The BFUG highlighted the need for action and confirmed the necessity of the liaison between the mobility action line with the action lines of data collection, stocktaking, social dimension and global dimension.

Agreement was reached on the establishment of a coordination group on mobility. The Chair of this group was still to be decided among the interested parties. The coordination group is supposed to coordinate the different activities within the mobility action line into a coherent programme, not to coordinate national policies or to reinvent definitions. There will be necessity to build upon seminars etc. of previous periods. Croatia expressed interest in joining the coordination group.

Apart from the mobility campaign animated by EI and ESU, there will be a series of seminars. France announces a mobility seminar to be held in September 2008 as part of the French Presidency programme.

For the network of portability of grants, the 3 coordinators, Netherlands, Sweden and Scotland will designate one single contact person for the BFUG.

6.3 Global dimension

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_6.3 [ToR European Higher Education in a global setting]

The BFUG confirmed the need of the liaison between the action line of global dimension with the action lines of mobility, stocktaking and quality assurance (also in relation to the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education).

Agreement was reached on the establishment of a working group "European Higher Education in a Global Setting" chaired by Austria and on its proposed terms of reference, including the cooperation with EC, CoE, ENIC-NARIC and UNESCO. Several countries expressed interest to join. The working group will have a large composition but will be split into sub-groups that will take care of specific work packages.

Will also be included in the work programme:

- Bologna seminar on "Transnational education and the UNESCO/ OECD Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education" organised by ENQA in cooperation with UNESCO
- Cooperation between Bologna Secretariat and the working group in developing the Bologna website for the purpose of addressing a global public

6.4. Data collection

BFUG confirmed the need of liaison between the action line of data collection and the the action lines of stocktaking, mobility, social dimension and employability.

Agreement was reached on the necessity of a BFUG group overseeing the activities of Eurostat and Eurostudent following the mandate received at the London conference and providing the contextual information for the statisticians. A first steering meeting organised by the European Commission, is planned for the beginning of November in Brussels. The Vice-Chair of the BFUG introduced a draft work plan prepared by Eurostat and Eurostudent to which BFUG members formulated proposals for correction, notably on the timeline which should be put in accordance with the final deadline for reporting in the context of the Bologna work programme 2007-2009 as a whole and the reference to "applicant countries".

It should be observed that the data collection project will not exclude countries outside the EHEA if they are interested to join.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary and Education International expressed interest in joining the working group.

A decision on who will chair the working group should be made before the end of the month.

6.5 Stocktaking

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_6.5 [ToR stocktaking]

The BFUG confirmed the fact that the stocktaking needs input from all other follow-up activities, including the work on data collection and stressed the necessity of liaison with similar evaluations of the process organised by EUA, ESU and Eurydice.

There was agreement to establish a working group chaired by Latvia of which the terms of reference were approved. Norway, Romania and Germany confirmed their interest to join the stocktaking working group.

The stocktaking will be quite different of nature, i.a. due to the explicit mandate in the London Communiqué to cover the action lines of mobility, social dimension and global dimension. The old indicators will also be used but it should be clear to all readers whether an old or new indicator is applied, or whether the standards for a certain score have been made more stringent in comparison with the previous stocktaking exercise. The working group will meet November 8, 2007 in Brussels. Next meetings are planned for February and September/October 2008, January 2009 and February 2009.

EUA and Eurydice will join the working group. A cooperative solution for the involvement of ESU (preparation of Bologna with Student Eyes) is still to be found.

It should be noted that the new Trends report and the update of the Eurydice *Focus on Higher Education* will only be ready in 2010. Eurydice will, however, provide a lighter report on recognition tools for the 46 countries and on mobility and portability for 31 countries.

6.6. Beyond 2010

A distinction should be made between two tasks that are, however, interlinked : on the one hand, the preparation of the report for the Ministerial meeting in 2009 containing political orientations for the future, and on the other, the independent assessment on the Bologna Process, which is only due for 2010. It would be important to see the two tasks as part of a sequence.

- Preparation of report for 2009

The BFUG could agree with open consultation process, involving the BFUG *as a whole* in preparing the report for the Ministerial meeting of 2009, including consultation of experts and stakeholders, seminars, electronic consultation, specific BFUG meeting(s) on the topic (Bosnia-Herzegovina expressed interest for hosting such meeting) and consultations and seminars organised by consultative members. In addition, individual countries can conduct surveys and consultation of national stakeholders.

It remains, however, an open question whether, for sake of channelling this input, a function of "general rapporteur" would be of help.

The Secretariat was entrusted to prepare a draft outline of the report with an indication of the different chapters to be included for the next BFUG meeting under Slovenian Presidency.

- Independent assessment

The BFUG took note of the EC's offer to finance an independent assessment. Although the EC will by consequence remain the final "owner" of the report, it will closely cooperate with the BFUG regarding the formulation of the terms of reference and the selection of the tender. A decision on the terms of reference of the independent assessment will be taken under Slovenian Presidency, possibly prepared by electronic consultation of the BFUG members. It was suggested that independence could imply involvement of opinions from outside Europe.

The Secretariat will prepare the draft terms of reference for the independent evaluation for the next BFUG meeting.

6.7 Degree structure

BFUG confirmed the need of the liaison between the action line of degree structure with the action lines on qualifications frameworks, lifelong learning and stocktaking.

There was agreement on the inclusion in the work programme of:

- The proposed Bologna seminars on common understanding of learning outcomes and on ECTS. The seminar proposed by Russia and Malta will reconsider an earlier date and decide on the location in Russia or Malta accordingly.
- Consultation on updating of ECTS key features

Greece informed the BFUG of its plan to organise a regional conference with Balkan countries.

6.8 Employability

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_6.8 [ToR employability]

BFUG confirmed the need of the liaison between the action line of employability and the action lines of lifelong learning, degree structure and qualifications framework, stocktaking and data collection.

There was agreement on the establishment of a working group chaired by the UK of which the terms of reference were approved. Business Europe, Hungary, UNESCO-CEPES, EURASHE and EUA (re)confirmed their interest to join. Specific issues to address are i.a. employment of bachelors and 3rd cycle graduates, how to involve employers in the public sector, careers of researchers, including in SMEs...

Proposals for seminars (by EURASHE and Malta) will be finalised in agreement with the working group.

6.9 Recognition

The BFUG agreed with the work plan of the ENIC-NARIC working party according to the mandate of the London Ministerial conference.

As membership of the working party is restricted to ENIC-NARICs, involvement of interested organisations (e.g. ESU) should be organised in a different way.

6.10 Qualifications framework

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_6.10 [ToR qualifications framework]

The BFUG confirmed the need of the liaison between the action line of qualifications framework and the action lines of recognition, the use of agreed transparency tools (ECTS, diploma supplement), quality assurance and stocktaking.

There was agreement on the overall work programme proposed by the Council of Europe, including European and regional conferences, and on the establishment of a coordination group for which at the time being there were more expressions of interest as available places. Latvia therefore proposed to withdraw.

The composition of the coordination group will be communicated before the end of the month. It was recommended that an ECTS expert would join the coordination group. The conclusions of the work on the qualifications framework will be finalised in cooperation with the BFUG as a whole.

Further issues that could be taken on board: project to organise an OECD/PISA-like survey for tertiary education, dialogue between EU and non-EU countries on the implementation of the two qualification frameworks (The Overarching Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area adopted in Bergen in 2005 and the European Qualifications Framework to be adopted in the near future by the EU), etc.

Georgia offered to organise a European conference as a follow-up to the conference Strasbourg. Montenegro expressed interest in a regional conference for South East Europe. In reply, the Council of Europe announced that a regional conference will be organised by Serbia, 1-2 November 2007.

6.11 Lifelong learning

BFUG confirmed the need of liaison between the action lines of lifelong learning, recognition, qualifications framework, employability and stocktaking. There was agreement to establish a Lifelong Learning coordination group (chair to be decided among the interested parties) and to organise Bologna seminars dealing with various aspects of LLL. The definitive programme should be communicated before the end of the month.

6.12 Quality assurance

BFUG agreed on the inclusion in the work programme of:

- Activities of E4 group in the establishment of the Register
- European QA fora

France announced that in the framework of the French EU Presidency a quality assurance conference would be organised in September 2008 with a focus on the European Standard and Guidelines, EQAR and the inclusion of research in QA for higher education.

6.13. Third cycle

The BFUG agreed to the inclusion in the work programme of a seminar organised by Finland. As an extra input to the seminar EUA suggested to make use of the previous EUA survey of doctoral studies and careers.

The reference to the Doctoral Education Council should not be seen as part of the Bologna work programme as it is a service to EUA members in the first place.

6.14 Social dimension

There was agreement on the establishment of a coordination group, mainly with a view to guarantee European comparability of information given on national strategies and regarding the definition of the parameters that should go in the reporting ("template" for national action plans). The coordination group should not be entrusted with proposing new definitions as there is a clear definition given in the London Communiqué.

It should be observed that social dimension is a transversal issue that should be looked at by all working groups and coordination groups. In the light of the Beyond 2010 strategy the question of whether there is a European way to tackle the social dimension in higher education is of relevance.

UNESCO-CEPES in cooperation with Eurostudent plan a conference on social dimension and data collection, Bucharest, 5-6 November 2007.

6.15 Conclusion

The Chair noted global approval of the Bologna work programme 2007-2009.

The distinction between working groups (working on the exploration of new issues within a specific action line) and coordination groups (coordinating the different actions within a specific Bologna action line) was maintained

Countries or organisations that expressed interest in joining working or coordination groups or proposed seminars and which were not yet included in the draft work programme were asked to confirm this information by e-mail by October 9 to the Secretariat.

Missing details (designation of contact person for each action line, group composition, confirmation of proposed seminars and events according to a coordinated timing) should be solved and communicated to the Secretariat before the end of October.

The final version of the work programme will be available in the beginning of November and will be put on the Bologna website.

7. Consultation on updating ECTS Key Features

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_7 [ECTS Key Features]

The European Commission presented the context of the update. No “revolution” should be expected. From the very beginning ECTS has contained both the element of content and workload. In recent years it became common practice to present the content in terms of learning outcomes. Both aspects cannot be seen in isolation. “Workload” should be interpreted as “workload to achieve certain learning outcomes”. The update of key features and supporting documents will contain more explicit reference to learning outcomes, lifelong learning and the qualifications framework.

Currently an electronic consultation is held among the national academic contact points that have been (re)nominated recently by the EU Member States. This group will meet in January 2008.

The consultation on the key features will come to a close at the end of October. On the basis of the updated key features the users’ guide will be updated accordingly.

Although the EC confirmed the willingness to take the full responsibility for the redrafting, several countries and organisations insisted on the necessity of transparency in the drafting process and more concrete information on the composition of the drafting group and the way the recently (re)appointed national academic contact points will be involved. The outcomes of the last Trends report and Bologna with Student Eyes indicating that the proper implementation of ECTS is still an issue to accomplish, should be kept in mind

In reply to concerns expressed that the revision of ECTS would not sufficiently make use of the potential of the ECVET proposal with its explicit orientation towards learning outcomes, the Commission recalled that initially it appeared to be impossible to set up a credit transfer and accumulation system for the whole range of education and training since the VET sector preferred to set up a specific system. The future ECVET recommendation will, however, show many similarities with ECTS, as it will also be based both on learning outcomes and workload. The recent meeting of Directors General for VET also opted for a standard of 60 points as an average equivalent to one year workload (and not 120 as appeared in previous drafts).

During the discussion on the key features document, several suggestions were given for rewording. In particular, a number of delegations voiced the opinion that credit transfer should in principle always be guaranteed in absence of “substantial differences”, and not only under the condition that there is an agreement between sending and receiving institution.

Confirmation of these remarks and suggestions in writing and further comments will be communicated to the Secretariat that will present an overview of the BFUG comments to the European Commission before the end of October.

8. E4 update on European Register of QA Agencies

Document: BFUG (PT) 12_8

The BFUG voted on the representation of countries as observers in the Register Committee for the period of 2008-2009.

81 ballots were received representing 405 votes and 40 blanks.

Results:

Austria: 61, Denmark: 50, Ireland: 36, Portugal: 33 and Estonia: 31.

These five countries were elected.

Further results: Belgium: 29, Croatia: 27, Greece: 23, Bulgaria: 21, Hungary: 20, Romania: 17 and Turkey: 17.

EUA, on behalf of E4, thanked the BFUG for the vote and gave a presentation on the future plans for the EQAR.

The Founding Assembly will take place 4 March 2008.

Apart from the Register Committee, the international association will consist of two bodies: governing board and general assembly. Countries are welcome to join the general assembly and communicate their intentions to E4 as soon as possible.

9. Updates by BFUG members (written contributions)

Documents: BFUG (PT) 12_9a [CoE contribution]
BFUG (PT) 12_9b [ENQA update]
BFUG (PT) 12_9c [EI update]

Extra information apart from written contributions:

Council of Europe will organise a first conference in Strasbourg, 20-21 November 2007, in the framework of the project "University between market and humanism".

ESU will celebrate its 20th anniversary 17 October 2007. ESU prepares a publication on the EU Lisbon strategy "Lisbon with Student Eyes".

Russia is planning a conference on higher education with its Central Asian neighbours and would like the BFUG to take the issue of relations with Central Asia on board when reflecting on Beyond 2010.

UNESCO-CEPES announced that the second World Conference on Higher Education will be held in the beginning of 2009. The dates are to be fixed at the General Conference later this month.

Austria inquired about the time path for decision on its proposal to host a Ministerial conference in 2010. This issue will be taken on the agenda under Slovenian Presidency.

Russia expressed interest to organise a Ministerial conference after 2010.

ENQA will organise a seminar on quality assurance in South East Europe in Sofia, 9 November 2007.

10. Application by Euroscience to become BFUG partner

Documents: BFUG (PT) 12_10a [Euroscience, cover letter]
BFUG (PT) 12_10b [Euroscience, application]
BFUG (PT) 12_10c [Euroscience, annex_1]
BFUG (PT) 12_10d [Euroscience, annex_2]

Decision postponed to next BFUG meeting. Euroscience will be asked to provide extra information on how they think to bring added value to the Bologna Process.

Secretariat will prepare information on the terms of reference for Bologna partnership.

11. Date and place of the next BFUG meeting

The meeting will take place at 13-14 March 2008, in Ljubljana (close to the airport). It will start in the morning of March 13 and end March 14 at noon.

The Secretariat announced that the incoming Presidency will organise a questionnaire among the BFUG members on the format and frequency of BFUG meetings as an orientation for the future.

12. Any other business

The Chair mentioned the fact that Presidencies are often approached by researchers and other individuals requesting to attend BFUG meetings as an observer and suggests that a general attitude could be agreed on at one of the future BFUG meetings.

The preliminary reactions of BFUG members pointed to the link with issues of confidentiality, precedents and similar requests that could be made by Bologna partners who in this stage have no access to BFUG meetings.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Portuguese Presidency in name of the BFUG for the excellent chairing and the remarkable hospitality.