

Third meeting of the EHEA Working Group on Implementation - Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments

9-10 November 2016, Nice (France)

Minutes

List of Participants

COUNTRY	NAME & SURNAME
AUSTRIA co-chair	<i>Helga POSSET</i>
AUSTRIA	<i>Regina AICHNER</i>
BFUG Secretariat, Head	<i>Françoise PROFIT</i>
BFUG Secretariat	<i>Mariana SAAD</i>
CROATIA	<i>Ana TECILAZIC GORSIC</i>
DENMARK	<i>Allan Bruun PEDERSEN</i>
SWEDEN	<i>Cecilia GEORGE</i>
EQAR	<i>Eric FROMENT</i>
ENQA	<i>Padraig WALSH</i>
ESU	<i>Lea MEISTER</i>
ETUCE	<i>Riku MATILAINEN</i>
EU COMMISSION	<i>Mette Moerk ANDERSEN</i>
FRANCE	<i>Eliane KOTLER</i>
FRANCE – WG3	<i>Luc HITTINGER</i>
GEORGIA co-chair	<i>Nino KOPALEISHVILI</i>
GERMANY	<i>Katrin FOHMANN</i>
GREECE	<i>Christos SKOURAS</i>
HUNGARY	<i>Simona TORTCOI</i>
POLAND co-chair	<i>Bartłomiej BANASZAK</i>
ROMANIA	<i>Daniela ALEXE</i>
UNITED KINGDOM	<i>Anca GREERE</i>

The group welcomed the following experts: Alberto AMARAL (A3ES), Marie-Jo GOEDERT (CTI), Tia LOUKKOLA (EUA), Heli MATTISEN (EKKA), Nora Skaburskienė (SKVC), Melinda SZABO (EQAR), Colin Tück (EQAR).

Apologies from: the representatives from Albania, Armenia, Belgium VL, Belarus, Business Europe, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey.

1. Welcome and Introduction to the meeting

Prof Jean-Christophe Martin, Deputy Vice President for International Affairs at the University of Nice, welcomed the participants and wished them a fruitful meeting.

The co-chairs of Working Group 2 thanked the hosts for organizing the meeting. Apologies were received from Noël Vercruysse (Belgium VL, co-chair). The Polish co-chair drew the attention of the participants to the importance given to Q.A. in the Bucharest and the Yerevan Communiqués. He stressed that the transnational aspect of Q.A. must not be forgotten.

2. Introductory session

Presentation by Pdraig Walsh, ENQA: "Setting the scene: different facets of external QA"

Presentation by Tia Loukkola, EUA: "The ESG 2015 at 1,5 years after Yerevan"

See attached files for the presentations.

In the following discussion, it was observed that experts's lack of knowledge about different national education systems and their particularities could cause frictions with the institution they are working with and mistakes in their assessments. Participants noted this problem highlighted the importance of dialogue in an international context.

The British representative pointed the very specific set of problems UK universities are facing now after Brexit and the new Bill for H.E., as it looks like the country is drawing back from internationalization.

3. Session on QA of cross-border higher education

Presentation by Pdraig Walsh, ENQA: "Introduction and results of the QACHE project"

Presentation by Alberto Amaral, A3ES: "From GATS to the Services Directive"

See attached files for the presentations.

The Polish co-chair gave the floor to the participants. The problem posed by fake universities and inappropriate legislation is considered by all participants as one of the major problems each country has to face today. Several examples were given and commented. Lack of reciprocal understanding by sending and host countries of each other's QA framework was mentioned as an important problem. The need for a proper memorandum of understanding signed by the host country and the institutions operating in it was highlighted.

4. Session on cross border quality assurance

Presentation by Melinda Szabo, EQAR: "Overview and introduction of the E4/EQAR Key Considerations"

Presentation by Marie-Jo Goedert, CTI: "International accreditation of engineering programmes by CTI"

Presentation by Heli Mattisen, EKKA: "Benefits and challenges in carrying out external quality assurance abroad"

Presentation by Nora Skaburskienė, SKVC: "Experience with reviews abroad and incoming cross-border QA in Lithuania"

See attached files for the presentations.

The Georgian co-chair started the session reminding the participants that the topic under discussion is one of the main commitments of the Yerevan communiqué.

Speakers presented cases studies and mapped challenges and achievements for implementation of commitments regarding cross-border QA. Several points were brought up during the discussion that followed.

- One important obstacle for cross-border QA reviews is the lack of a common language or the very different levels of English of the people involved. Other important challenges to be tackled are the legal aspects as well as the cultural differences. Cross-border QA is also connected with high financial costs. According to recent ENQA study most cross-border activities of QA agencies are self-funded.
- The question was raised of what happens to students following programmes that don't pass the cross-border assessment. It was asked if protection measures for the students were envisaged in case of closure. Part of the assistance assumed closure necessary followed in case of failure to meet standards. The delegate from CTI shared a different experience: in countries where engineering degrees did not meet CTI standards, this has led to reforms and improvements.
- As the Austrian co-chair asked about Bachelor degrees in engineering, the CTI delegate stressed that France delivers engineering diplomas at the master degree only. She made clear that CTI does not accredit Bachelor degrees.
- Cross-border QA creates an opportunity to think "out of box," mutual sharing of experience and poses new challenges and motivation to mobile agencies.
- Mostly, Cross- border QA is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area".

5. Session on Quality Assurance of joint programmes

Presentation by Colin Tück, EQAR: "The European Approach – where do we stand 1,5 years after Yerevan?"

See attached file for the presentation.

The first case study of QA assessment based on the European Approach was presented (joint programme run by a consortium: University College-East Norway, Stenden University of Applied Sciences, University College Zealand). This was the occasion for a number of participants to share their experience. The participants discussed on the advantages of the European approach when implementing joint countries programmes. Lack of clear interested from stakeholders was highlighted as a problem.

6. Liaison with other working groups and outcomes of WG2 activities

The morning session started with a welcome by Frédérique Vidal, President of the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis.

Short presentations were given of the last outcomes of other working and advisory groups meetings.

The Secretariat explained that AG1 (“EHEA International Cooperation”) was focusing on the organization of the next Bologna Policy Forum and developing inter-regional dialogue. Several regional entities as well as international organizations were invited to Nihzny Novgorod. Their representatives highlighted the importance for Bologna countries not to sound too Euro-centric. The next meeting will take place in Madrid where representatives from South America, the Mediterranean and the Sub-Sahel region have been invited.

The Secretariat Head gave an overview of the work done by AG3 (“Non-implementation”) and AG2 (“Support for the Belarus roadmap”). Regarding implementation of reforms in Belarus, delays are identified. She informed the group that a main issue had been raised concerning non-implementation at the last BFUG Board meeting, as now exclusion from the Bologna process in case of non compliance with the standards might be envisaged. She noted that this issue could be discussed at the Bratislava meeting in December.

It was suggested that AG3, WG3 and WG2 could collaborate more often on shared issues.

Regarding the work done by AG4 on “Diploma Supplement revision”, the representative from the European Commission explained that no main changes had been made and that the issue of implementation has been discussed. The representative for the Danish Agency for Higher Education and co-chair of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, Allan Brun Pedersen, stressed the importance of digitalization in the Diploma Supplement implementation and development.

As a member of WG1 (“Monitoring”), the Austrian co-chair informed of the progress of that group. The last meeting in Berlin in September 2016 focused on the structure of the Report for 2018. She briefly presented the structure of the future report, based on the 2015 Report, and the new items to be introduced.

Luc Hittinger, co-chair of WG3 (“New Goals”) informed the group that work on “new learners” is almost finalized. At their last meeting in Stockholm in October, the WG3 participants have been working on several topics, the three main ones being: 1) how to differentiate competencies from learning outcomes; 2) the impact of digital tools such as MOOCs on learning and teaching; 3) facilitation of mobility for students in the North.

7. Outcomes of WG2 activities (table of events, contribution to the BFUG meeting, final WG report)

The Polish co-chair stressed that the outcomes should reflect the methodology of the group and that the report should focus on specific topics. He presented a timeline organizing the group’s work for the next 10 months. He suggested a co-chairs session in January 2017, preparing the next WG meeting in Austria in March 2017, another meeting in June to discuss the updated version of the report and the last meeting in the fall 2017 in order to have a final version ready for the BFUG meeting in Estonia in November 2017.

Asked for feedback on the draft outline of the final report, especially the structure and the way to include examples, the participants rose several issues. One of them was the events survey. It was noticed that many events were intended for a national audience and tackled specific problems encountered in national H.E. systems. This might make them not relevant enough for the final report.

The European Commission representative stressed that the report had to be honest about the shortcomings of the current work plan. She argued that in order to help the next round of the BFUG, the report had to acknowledge that getting feedback from each country about the events it was organizing was quite a Herculean task.

It was also noted that the order of issues covered with the report should be reshuffled.

Information was shared by several representatives about events that took place this year in their countries and future events were mentioned.

It appeared that the questionnaire has actually been sent by several representatives to institutions or organisations in their country. This has meant delays in getting them back. The Austrian representative asked for the logos (Bologna process and EHEA) to be added to the questionnaire.

Several participants informed that their organizations were willing to share conclusions from their meetings with the group and help fill the report.

The Danish representative argued that conclusions should be action oriented and not just policy recommendations.

It was suggested that the group should focus on the three key commitments, however at the same time it should follow its Terms of Reference and reflect on conclusions from the Implementation Report and implementation of measures highlighted in the appendix to the Yerevan Communiqué.

The group examined the importance of “short cycle” as an issue which still needs to be discussed. It was indicated that participants would appreciate to be given another opportunity to discuss the decisions taken in the last meeting in Georgia. It was concluded that the issue of short cycle will be discussed while debating respective part of the group report.

The representative for ESU stressed that it would be wrong not to examine other topics. She suggested peer review for the cycle system, which is also a subject discussed in AG3.

It was also argued that academic mobility should be better supported and should be a topic of the WG meeting. Lack of information on staff mobility is a general problem and it was suggested that more work should be done to tackle this problem in order to be able to draw any conclusions about the measures to encourage mobility and the success of implementation.

Regarding the next meeting, The European Commission representative proposed to have “recognition” as a topic for one of the next meetings. It can be matched with the discussion on RPL initially planned for the meeting in June. The meeting in March can tackle the topic of staff mobility.

It was noted that the format of the meetings has been changed to include a whole day devoted to presentations by experts and the co-chairs were asked what format they envisaged for the next meeting.

The co-chairs announced they would circulate the conclusions from the Salamanca meeting organized in the autumn 2016 by Spain. Round table on “Current challenges in the implementation of the EHEA commitments”

The Austrian co-chair then asked participants about specific challenges encountered in their countries. In Austria emphasis is placed on social dimension of H.E. and mobility. Fairness of recognition of prior learning is also a priority and new initiatives are under study.

The Polish co-chair informed the participants that the process of preparation of the Polish reform of HE is being carried out. Is it based on the strong contribution of researchers and experts and particular issues are discussed with the academic community during 10 national conferences in the framework of National Congress of Science. In May 2016 first results of a new graduate tracking system based on the administrative data from the HE information system and the social security system have been released. .

The U.K. representative highlighted the important reforms taking place at the moment in her country. QA as well as Teaching Excellence Framework have been completely redesigned. Student fees will be raised and access to funding for teaching and research is also being changed. Brexit has already compromised UK access to EU funding for research but also poses the problem of European students who were till now considered domestic students, paying domestic fees and benefiting from the same rights as British students.

The Georgian co-chair informed the participants that QA has been a priority in her country. In 2016 QA framework was reviewed based on the revised ESG and new standards for authorization (institutional accreditation) were adopted. Another project completed in 2016 was on revision of the National Qualifications Framework with an aim to further ensure its alignment with the overarching European Qualifications Frameworks, the process involved wide discussions with stakeholders. The National Qualifications Framework in Georgia was adopted in 2010. . In 2015, Georgia introduced some amendments to legislation to further support implementation of joint programmes granting joint/double/multiple degrees.

The Romanian representative informed that a change of government was to be expected in her country in December this year and that this could have consequences for H.E. policies. Thus, although an event has been planned for 2017, it has not been possible to decide on a main topic yet. However, Romania is planning to apply for EU funding for an equity and social dimension programme and has put plagiarism at the top of its agenda.

The representative from Greece highlighted that a main problem faced today by his country was the integration of refugees and the recognition of diplomas and prior learning in that context. He argued that such an important question should be higher in the Bologna agenda.

Next meeting:

Next meeting will take place on 21st March 2017, in Vienna (Austria) just before an International Peer learning Activity on Social Dimension in the EHEA organized by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy in Linz, on the Austrian Bologna day, 22nd march 2017.

A “Save the date” email will be sent to all participants as soon as date and venue are decided.

AOB

The co-chairs ended the meeting thanking Eliane Kotler and the University of Nice for their warm welcome in beautiful surroundings.