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ORGANISATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS STOCKTAKING

Document for decision by the BFUG Meeting on 9 March 2004

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 set out a number of objectives as building blocks for a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), to be established by 2010. The objectives have since been reinforced and expanded at ministerial conferences in Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003). For these conferences, reports have been prepared on progress in the preceding two-year period. They include reports from a general rapporteur, national reports on implementation of the Bologna goals in the member states, and reports from organisations that are involved in the process in various ways, with the *Trends* reports of the EUA as a notable example. In addition the picture is complemented by statistics from sources such as the European Commission, as well as independent higher education research.

At the Berlin summit it was decided to carry out a stocktaking exercise in time for the next ministerial conference in Bergen in 2005. The Berlin Communiqué reads:

With a view to the goals set for 2010, it is expected that measures will be introduced to take stock of progress achieved in the Bologna Process. A mid-term stocktaking exercise would provide reliable information on how the Process is actually advancing and would offer the possibility to take corrective measures, if appropriate.

Ministers charge the Follow-up Group with organising a stocktaking process in time for their summit in 2005 and undertaking to prepare detailed reports on the progress and implementation of the intermediate priorities set for the next two years:

- quality assurance*
- two-cycle system*
- recognition of degrees and periods of studies*

Participating countries will, furthermore, be prepared to allow access to the necessary information for research on higher education relating to the objectives of the Bologna Process. Access to data banks on ongoing research and research results shall be facilitated.

It is not clear from the text of the Berlin Communiqué whether the stocktaking process should be limited to the three priority areas, or whether it should encompass all the Bologna action lines. However, the discussions before the Berlin meeting indicate that stocktaking only in the three areas mentioned was intended. This is also how the mandate from the ministers was interpreted by the Board at its meeting in Oslo on 29 January. The other Bologna action lines will be covered by other forms of reporting, including the national reports.

It is implicit from the mandate from Berlin that “stocktaking” means something different from the reporting that has been done until now. Conducted midway on the road to the EHEA, the report from the stocktaking will have a wider impact than the previous reports. It should also be more focussed on progress related to defined objectives, both at the national and European levels, rather than activities carried out. In addition it should offer the possibility to take corrective action. The objectives should be translated as far as possible into operational goals. Such an approach will provide a good basis for further policy decisions, at both international and national level. While the stocktaking exercise is political, it must be conducted objectively.

2. DETERMINING FACTORS

Several factors influence the choice of working method(s) for the stocktaking exercise, among them scope, timing, relation to other reports, and financing. As indicated, it is assumed that the exercise will be limited to the three priority areas defined for the period from 2003 to 2005. In these areas, specific goals were set by the Berlin conference. For the other action lines, the extent to which clear, measurable goals have been set varies. Defining such goals for all the action lines for 2010 will be a major challenge in the next phase of the Bologna Process.

2.1. Time Span

The question of timing is crucial. The setting of intermediate goals for 2005 must be taken to mean that they are to be reached before the Bergen ministerial conference. The stocktaking should therefore be carried out as late in the period as possible. On the other hand, a draft report from the stocktaking exercise must be ready in time for the BFUG meeting in March 2005, since the final report is to be submitted to the ministerial conference under the authority of the BFUG. On this basis, it is proposed that the stocktaking will measure the achievement in each member country by reference to January 2005. This will allow time for the results to be reported to the summit in May 2005.

The terms of reference for the stocktaking and how it is to be carried out must be decided by the BFUG meeting in Dublin on 9 March. This leaves about 11 months for the work.

2.2. Relation to Other Reports

At the Board meeting in Rome on 15 November 2003, it was decided that there will not be a general rapporteur for the period from 2003 to 2005, and that instead the Secretariat should

prepare a short report to the Bergen ministerial conference on BFUG activities in the period. In addition there will be a new set of national reports similar to those that were prepared for the Berlin conference. At its meeting in Oslo on 29 January, the Board asked the Secretariat to draft a common format for the national reports, where reporting on the implementation of the intermediate priorities will be a standard element. This not only eases the collation of data, but will facilitate comparability where appropriate.

The EUA *Trends* reports have been valuable contributions to the monitoring of the Bologna Process. The *Trends 2003* report was based on questionnaires sent to ministries, rectors' conferences, student organisations, individual institutions and social partners. At the Board meeting in Oslo, the EUA confirmed that there will be a *Trends 2005* report. In the model proposed below, data from the *Trends* survey will be used in the stocktaking, cf. section 4.2.

ENQA, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB, was commissioned by the Bologna education ministers in Berlin to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring adequate peer review procedures and to report back to the Bergen conference through the BFUG. The resulting standards and procedures will only be implemented after 2005. Nevertheless, stocktaking in this area needs to be coordinated with the ENQA project, and ENQA will be asked to contribute.

2.3. Financing

In the proposed model the stocktaking project will involve a working group and various information-gathering methods and vehicles. It is assumed that financing may be sought from the EU Commission and/or other sources.

3. DECISION BY THE BOARD MEETING IN OSLO

The Berlin Communiqué places responsibility for the stocktaking exercise firmly with the BFUG. The Bologna Process is a political process, and its political dimensions can only be best considered by the BFUG and the responsible ministers. The importance of drawing political implications from the exercise was also emphasised at the Board meeting in Rome in November 2003. At its meeting in Oslo on 29 January, the Board therefore recommended that the stocktaking should be carried out under direct supervision of the BFUG rather than being delegated to an external organisation or partner. The full Board decision reads:

The Board recommends that, in line with the mandate from the Berlin ministerial conference, the stocktaking process should be carried out under direct supervision of the Bologna Follow-up Group. On the basis of document BFUGB2 3c and the discussion in the meeting, the Board appoints the following members to an interim working group to prepare a draft paper for the meeting of the BFUG on 9 March: The Chair, The Vice Chair, the Secretariat, the EU Commission and the EUA.

The present document has been prepared on the basis of deliberations in the interim working group, which met in Brussels on 17 February.

4. ORGANISATION OF THE EXERCISE

4.1. Working Group Appointed by the BFUG

It is proposed that the BFUG should appoint a working group to be responsible for the stocktaking. In collecting information, the group will cooperate with a number of partners, cf. section 4.2. After the information-gathering phase the working group will analyse the data and prepare a report to the BFUG, including draft recommendations to the Bergen ministerial conference. The group will also need to meet during the information-gathering phase in order to supervise the work. An interim report should be presented to the BFUG meeting in October, possibly also at one or more Board meetings.

A mandate for the working group is formulated in the draft decision in section 6. The group must have access to all relevant national information resources in member states as specified in the Berlin Communiqué.

In order for the working group to be efficient, it should meet the following requirements:

- it should be kept as small as possible
- in view of the political nature of the process, Bologna member states should constitute at least half the members, including the Chair/Vice Chair
- the EU Commission, the EUA, and ESIB should be represented as partners in the stocktaking

The group may seek expertise from other sources as it sees fit, such as in the areas of quality assurance and recognition of qualifications. Some of the representatives of Bologna member states and/or consultative member organisations might at the same time be experts in the areas mentioned.

On this basis, the composition of the group might look as follows:

- Ireland, the Netherlands and Luxembourg as the three countries chairing the Bologna Process during the period in question
- one representative each from the EU Commission, the EUA and ESIB

The following names are proposed:

Ian McKenna, Ireland
Marlies Leegwater, Netherlands
, Luxembourg
Peter van der Hijden, EU Commission
Lesley Wilson, EUA
, ESIB

The group will elect its own chair. The complexity of the task is an argument for having the same chair throughout the process.

It is proposed that secretarial functions will be provided by the BFUG Secretariat. Secretarial support will be particularly important in the final phase of summing up results and drafting

the report. As this will also be a period of intensive planning for the Bergen conference, the Secretariat may have to be temporarily strengthened, both in terms of expertise and capacity. Given the amount of information involved, careful thought needs to be given to how it is to be processed, put together and presented in the final stocktaking report.

4.2. Collection of Data

The planning of the stocktaking so far has made it clear that the working group will be able to rely on a variety of information sources and surveys, and that to some degree these can be tailored to the purpose. Possible partners include EURYDICE, the EUA, ESIB, ENQA and the ENIC/NARIC network. In addition the national reports will play an important role. Partners that are not represented in the working group, may be invited to its meetings if necessary.

The working group should meet as soon as possible after the Dublin meeting in order to finalise a set of questions and give directions to the actors involved. For instance, the schedule fixed for the *EUA Trends 2005* report means that inputs from the working group to the survey must be given before 14 April. At the other end, the group will need at least a month to analyse and interpret the data and draft its report. This means that the actors taking part in the exercise must give their feedback to the working group in the course of January 2005.

For a maximum degree of accuracy and reliability to be achieved, the working group should take measures to validate the results of the stocktaking before they are presented through consultation with stakeholders and national authorities (ministries).

4.2.1. EURYDICE

EURYDICE has recently carried out a study charting implementation of the Bologna goals in the 29 countries taking part in the Socrates programme.¹ The report broadly covers the three priority areas defined in the Berlin Communiqué and forming the object of the stocktaking. It describes the situation in the first half of 2003, and thus needs to be updated. In addition it will need to be expanded to cover all the Bologna member states. Contacts will be made with EURYDICE before the BFUG meeting to ascertain whether such a task can be accommodated within its work programme, and if so to what extent the questionnaire can be modified to fit the needs of the stocktaking. Alternative ways of updating the data may also be possible.

An updated and expanded EURYDICE study would provide a solid factual basis for the stocktaking and a framework for the more qualitative surveys carried out by some of the other actors. EURYDICE also has a validating system which ensures legitimacy. Where necessary the study may be supplemented by the factual part of the national reports, cf. below.

4.2.2. National Reports

As mentioned in section 2.2, national reports will be prepared by all Bologna member states before the Bergen conference in a format to be decided by the Board at its June meeting. It is envisaged that the reports will be in two parts, where one consists of detailed factual

¹ *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2003/04*, Eurydice 2003. A link to the report is found at <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/b/hind.htm>

information in response to a set of questions from the working group, while in the other, main part each country will be able to choose the mode of presentation, focus and emphasis within the limits defined by the Board.

A division of labour needs to be worked out between the national reports and an updated EURYDICE survey. The EURYDICE survey gives an overview of the extent to which the different elements of the Bologna reforms are in place in each country, notably the two-cycle degree system and implementation of the Diploma Supplement and ECTS. In addition to confirming these elements, the national reports can give supplementary information, e.g. with regard to legislation and other forms of institutionalising the reforms. In addition EURYDICE does not cover e.g. qualifications frameworks.

In line with what is said above, **the deadline for the national reports should be set to 31 December 2004.**

4.2.3. Trends 2005

The European University Association has confirmed that it is planning a *Trends 2005* report, building on its reports to the previous Bologna ministerial conferences. The *Trends* report is independent of the stocktaking process and will not be finalised until March 2005. However, the EUA has indicated that inputs from the working group may be included in the survey and that preliminary results can be fed back in time for the final phase of the stocktaking in January/February 2005.

The starting-point of the new *Trends* report will be an analysis of data at the national level in cooperation with national rectors' conferences. On this basis, two to four institutions per country will be selected for site visits. In this way the findings in *Trends 2003* will be revalidated, with focus on the three priority areas.

The EUA will cooperate with EURASHE to make sure that the picture presented is as complete as possible. Whereas in previous *Trends* reports the questions have been addressed to heads of institutions, the site visits will enable the new survey to also reach other groups. The survey will thus be the main vehicle for stocktaking at the institutional level. Ministries will not be included, as they will be the addressees of questions in the EURYDICE study and the national reports.

4.2.4. ESIB, ENQA and the ENIC/NARIC Network

Through the site visits, the *Trends* survey will to some extent cover the student perspective. In addition, ESIB is planning to update the survey which it prepared for the Berlin conference (available at www.esib.org) and has indicated its willingness to include inputs from the working group. It is important that the students' point of view is represented.

ENQA has recently carried out a study of quality procedures and systems in European higher education (available at <http://www.enqa.net/texts/procedures.pdf>). The study is based on data from 2002 and covers 24 countries. An updated and expanded version would answer many of the stocktaking questions on quality assurance. ENQA will be contacted before the BFUG meeting to find out if this is possible.

Some of the questions related to recognition can best be answered by national ENIC/NARICs. This might be done either directly or through ministries/in the national reports.

4.2.5. Other Information Sources

In addition the stocktaking will be able to draw on a large amount of statistics, higher education research and other existing information from a variety of sources. Ongoing work such as the CHEPS study on student financing commissioned by the Dutch presidency or the updating and expanding of the EUROSTUDENT report may also be relevant.

5. MEASURING POINTS

5.1. Mandate from the Berlin Conference

The mandate from the Berlin conference to the BFUG is to “prepare detailed reports on the progress and implementation of the intermediate priorities set” in the three priority areas. It is important that the information obtained is as accurate and reliable as possible as a basis for decision by the ministers in 2005 on further follow-up measures and priorities. “Hard data” will be needed on the situation in each Bologna member state. The resulting report should be analytical and may contain elements of comparison at a general level, but detailed country-to-country comparisons are not foreseen.

The benchmarks or indicators to be measured in the stocktaking can be derived from the Berlin Communiqué. A tentative list might look as follows:

Quality assurance

By 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved;
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results;
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, international participation, co-operation and networking.

The Communiqué states that the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself. It therefore seems reasonable to include as a requirement that all institutions should have internal, formalised quality assurance systems.

The two-cycle degree system

- Implementation of the two-cycle system should have begun by 2005 in all member states.
- Work should have begun in all member states on the development of a framework of qualifications for higher education. Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. Furthermore, first cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes, and second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies.

A survey might be made of the degrees/qualifications actually offered/awarded by institutions, especially in countries with a large degree of institutional autonomy, such as the UK, and/or countries where there has previously been no first cycle, such as Russia.

Recognition of degrees and periods of study

- The Lisbon Recognition Convention should have been ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process.
- Every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge, issued in a widely spoken European language.

In addition the Berlin Communiqué emphasises the importance of ECTS and encourages its further development. As the use of ECTS greatly facilitates recognition, it seems reasonable to include a requirement that a system compatible with ECTS should be in use for credit transfer and accumulation in all member states.

5.2. Operationalisation into Questions

For the stocktaking to yield sufficiently precise answers, the indicators need to be further operationalised. Questions must be formulated with the objective of obtaining unambiguous, verifiable and comparable data. For instance, at the Board meeting in Oslo it was mentioned by the EU Commission that out of 90 Diploma Supplements examined, only 27 were in accordance with the agreed format. All the institutions in question, however, would come out in a survey as having introduced the DS.

For each of the indicators listed in section 5.1, one or two key questions will need to be asked to establish whether the goal formulated in the Berlin Communiqué has been reached, with follow-up questions to get further information. Typically, the “key” questions will be addressed to the national level, whereas the follow-up questions may aim at the national or the institutional level.

For the overall indicators, degrees of achievement should be specified, e.g.

- goals fully achieved
- legislation or regulations introduced
- legislation in preparation (with implementation date)

A preliminary list of questions is provided in Appendix 1. The list is given as an example only and needs further elaboration. **The set of questions that will form the basis for the stocktaking should be finalised by the working group appointed by the BFUG.**

6. CONCLUSION

In line with the mandate given to it by Ministers in the Berlin Communiqué, the Bologna Follow-up Group should be responsible for the conduct of the stocktaking exercise. Detailed reports will be prepared on the progress and implementation of the intermediate priorities set in the three priority areas defined for the period: quality assurance, the two-cycle degree

system and recognition of degrees and periods of study. The BFUG appoints the following members to a working group to carry out the stocktaking and report back to the BFUG:

Ian McKenna, Ireland
Marlies Leegwater, Netherlands
, Luxembourg
Peter van der Hijden, EU Commission
Lesley Wilson, EUA
, ESIB

The working group is asked to report on progress to the BFUG meeting in October 2004, and to prepare its final report in time for the BFUG meeting in March 2005. The final report should describe the progress of the Bologna Process by **January 2005**.

The members of the BFUG undertake to give the working group access to all relevant national information resources as specified in the Berlin Communiqué. The working group will be assisted in its task by the BFUG Secretariat.

In collecting information for the stocktaking the working group will cooperate with a number of partners. EURYDICE will be asked to update and expand its 2003 study of implementation of the Bologna goals in 29 European countries. At the institutional level, the European University Association will carry out a survey as a basis for a new *Trends* report, which will also feed into the stocktaking process. Similarly, ESIB will conduct a survey of student organisations. ENQA and the ENIC/NARIC networks may also be asked to contribute. In addition information will be gathered through the national reports.

It is essential that the information coming out of the stocktaking is as accurate and reliable as possible as a basis for decision by the Ministers in 2005 on further follow-up measures and priorities. A tentative list of benchmarks and indicators to be used is provided in document BFUG 2_6. In drawing up a final set of questions to be used, the working group should further operationalise the indicators with the objective of ensuring a maximum degree of validity and relevance. Before reporting back to the BFUG, the working group should take measures to further validate the results of the stocktaking through consultation with stakeholders and national authorities.

The report of the working group will form the basis for a report by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Bergen in 2005.

APPENDIX 1. STOCKTAKING – DRAFT QUESTIONS

The questions are provided for **illustration only**. The final set of questions to be used in the stocktaking will be drawn up by the working group after the BFUG meeting. The level at which the questions are addressed and the source(s) for obtaining answers have been indicated as far as possible. Where more than one information-gathering vehicle is listed, it is intended that the question should be put through both or all three channels.

Action Line/Question	Level	Source
Quality Assurance		
<i>National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.</i>		
Does the country have a quality assurance system defining the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved?	National	EURYDICE National reports
Is the quality assurance system regulated by law?	National	National reports
What powers are conferred on national or other quality assurance agencies, and by what instruments?	National	National reports
What is the relationship between the quality assurance agency(ies) and the government?	National	National reports
<i>National quality assurance systems should include evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.</i>		
Are the elements mentioned in place?	May vary between countries	ENQA National reports
Were any institutions or programmes evaluated in 2003? In 2004? What are the plans for 2005?	May vary between countries	National reports <i>Trends</i>
How are the evaluation reports published? Who has access to them?	May vary between countries	National reports <i>Trends</i>
Do students participate in external quality reviews?		National reports ESIB survey
<i>National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.</i>		
Is a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures in place?	National	ENQA National reports

<i>National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.</i>		
Are external peers included in the quality assurance agency(ies) at Board level?	National	ENQA National reports
Do external peers participate in evaluations?	National	ENQA National reports
<i>All higher education institutions should have internal, formalised quality assurance systems.</i>		
Are institutions required by law or other regulation to have internal quality assurance systems?	National	National reports
What percentage of the institutions have such systems?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
Who is responsible within the institution?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
What is the system of reporting?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
What is the system of following up results?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
What is the extent and forms of student participation?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
To what extent do students participate in internal quality assurance procedures at the institutional level?		ESIB survey
The two-cycle degree system		
<i>Implementation of the two-cycle system should have begun by 2005 in all member states.</i>		
Is a two-cycle degree system - in place? - being implemented? - on the point of being implemented? (with relevant dates)	National	EURYDICE National reports
Is a two-cycle system prescribed by law?	National	National reports
Is it the main system?	National	National reports
By what instruments or regulations, if any, are the cycles or levels defined?	National	National reports
Are two-cycle degrees optional or obligatory for the institutions?	National Institution	National reports <i>Trends</i>
Are other types of degrees offered?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
Can students enrol for bachelor's or equivalent degrees in 2005?	Institution	<i>Trends</i> ESIB survey
Have any candidates graduated with such degrees?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>

<i>Work should have begun in all member states on the development of a framework of qualifications for higher education. Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. Furthermore, first cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes, and second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies.</i>		
Is a national framework of qualifications being developed?	National	National reports
When did the work begin?	National	National reports
When will a first version be ready?	National	National reports
Do first cycle degrees exist which do not give access to second cycle programmes?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
Do second cycle degrees exist which do not give access to doctoral studies?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>
Do students experience transitional problems between the different cycles?		ESIB survey
Recognition of degrees and periods of study		
<i>Every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge, issued in a widely spoken European language</i>		
Are institutions obliged by law or other regulation to issue the Diploma Supplement as described?	National	EURYDICE National reports
If not, is such legislation or regulation in the process of being introduced? What is the time schedule?	National	National reports
Are students experiencing problems in relation to the DS?		ESIB survey
<i>The Lisbon Recognition Convention should have been ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process.</i>		
Has the Convention been ratified?	National	EURYDICE National reports
If not, what is the time schedule for ratification?	National	National reports
Are the prescribed institutions in place?	National	National reports

How is the national information centre function organised?	National	National reports
What is the average processing time for applications?		ENIC/ NARIC
<i>A system compatible with ECTS should be in use for credit transfer and accumulation</i>		
Is ECTS or a compatible system in use nationally?	National	EURYDICE National reports
If not, what is the time schedule for implementation?	National	National reports
Is the credit transfer system regulated by law?	National	National reports
Is it also used for credit accumulation?	National	National reports
To what extent is ECTS in use at the institutional level?	Institution	<i>Trends</i>