**EHEA Working Group on Structural Reforms**

**First meeting, Brussels, 13-14 December 2012**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

List of participants:

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| --- | --- |
| ***Name*** | ***Country / Organisation*** |
| Sjur Bergan (Co-Chair) | Council of Europe |
| Noël Vercruysse, (Co-Chair) | Belgium/Flemish Community |
| Fr. Friedrich Bechina (Co-Chair) | Holy See |
| Banaszak Bartłomiej (Co-Chair) | Poland |
| Magalie Soenen, | Belgium/Flemish Community |
| Regina Aichner | Austria |
| Kevin Guillaume | Belgium, French Community Federation Wallonia-Brussels |
| Yana Dimitrova Yotova | Bulgaria |
| Ana Tecilazić Goršić | Croatia |
| Allan Bruun Pedersen | Denmark |
| Carita Blomqvist | Finland |
| Patricia Pol | France |
| Birger Hendriks | Germany |
| Christos Skouras | Greece |
| Erzsébet Szlamka | Hungary |
| Bryan Maguire | Ireland |
| Banu Narbekova | Kazakhstan |
| Aurelija Valeikienė | Lithuania |
| Larisa Bugaian | Moldova |
| Mark Frederiks | The Netherlands |
| Inês Vaz Pinto Almeida Vasques Branco | Portugal |
| Selma Memic | Sweden |
| Carolyn Campbell | United Kingdom |
| Ivan Babyn | Ukraine |
| Frank Petrikowski | European Commission |
| Anita Krémó | EQF |
| Karin Åmossa | Educational International |
| Achim Hopbach | ENQA |
| Colin Tück | EQAR |
| Nevena Vuksanović | ESU |
| Tia Loukkola | EUA |
| Gayane Harutyunyan | BFUG Secretariat |
| Ani Hakobyan | BFUG Secretariat |

Apologies were received from Armenia, Czech Republic, BUSINESSEUROPE and EURASHE.

**Welcome and introduction to the meeting by the Co-Chairs**

Noël Vercruysse (Belgium/Flemish Community), the hosting Co-Chair, welcomed the participants to the first meeting of the EHEA working group on Structural Reforms and introduced the Co-Chairing team.

He briefly gave background information on the work scheme of the meeting and noted that the meeting would be held mainly in plenary sessions and only in the afternoon of the first day it would be conducted in four parallel sessions.

The agenda of the meeting was adopted unanimously.

Sjur Bergan (CoE) also welcomed the participants and introduced in brief the rationale for setting up the WG. He also stressed the need to link the four main policy areas together: qualifications frameworks (QF), quality assurance (QA), recognition and transparency. In addition, the following main objectives of the Structural Reforms WG were outlined:

* To find explicit means for better interaction of the four policy areas in order to properly coordinate various elements of the structural reforms, as well as to consider the impact of the structural reforms on the Bologna goals.
* To achieve more coherence between the four policy areas.
* To enable structural reforms to enhance the social dimension, mobility and lifelong learning across the EHEA.
* To promote transversal issues such as employability, the global dimension and student-centred learning.
* To make new policy proposals at the EHEA level on the one hand and ensure their implementation on the other hand, along with facilitating further implementation of the existing EHEA structures and already adopted strategies within respective policy areas.
* To ensure that the existing structures actually serve their purposes and are articulated properly.
* To maintain contacts to the sub groups established under the authority of the WG on Structural Reforms, namely the Network of National Correspondents for QFs and the Ad-hoc WGs on the Revision of the ECTS User’s Guide and the Third Cycle.
* To follow developments in related initiatives, including the Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition and the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance (ESG).
* To focus more on implementation on national and institutional levels in the coming years.
* To develop a common understanding and practice of learning outcomes.
* To enhance communication with the BFUG by regular reporting.

Sjur Bergan recalled that tools developed by other players, e.g. European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the Diploma Supplement, the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), the European Qualifications for Lifelong learning (EQF), are crucial for structural reforms.

Regarding the working methods of the Structural Reforms WG, it was underlined that the four Co-Chairs have to maintain close contact with all other main EHEA WGs as well as invite the representatives of the other WGs to the Structural Reforms WG meetings, when appropriate. Additionally the Co-Chairs stressed the working aspect, meaning that the members are expected not simply to attend but also to play an active role in and between the meetings.

For more information, please see the documents below:

 

**Keynote speech:** **“European Higher Education at the Crossroads”, the early phase (1998-2001) and the advanced phase (2003-2009)**

Pavel Zgaga, one of the most prominent higher education scholars in Europe, a former Minister of Education of Slovenia and a signer of the Bologna Declaration, was invited by the Co-Chairs of the WG to present his research on the Bologna principles published in “European Higher Education at the Crossroads” (2012)[[1]](#footnote-1). The main topic of the research is the diversity and conflicting usage of the “EHEA/Bologna principles” term. The research investigates how many of these principles exist and the way they were developed. In this context, it was mentioned that the concept of the EHEA/Bologna principles has been constructed mainly socially and post festum. Furthermore, after its emergence, any HE issues at institutional and national levels were attributed to “Bologna”. The author characterised this phenomenon as “pan-Bolognasation” which provides a cheap excuse to label all “principles” as “the EHEA principles”.

When analysing the principles, the need to identify the origins, the sources of the Bologna related documents and policy papers became obvious. Professor Zgaga also highlighted the importance of looking back into the argumentation within the WGs, in order to see what kind of dilemmas were discussed and why certain ideas and principles appeared at the end. It was further noted that in the early documentation (1999), 4 main principles, i.e. quality, mobility, diversity and openness, were outlined. Though still relevant, now they are put in a broader context.

In light of the fact that during 1998-2009 the EHEA principles were evolved and consolidated, P. Zgaga tried to reorganise them and build “European common house for HE”.

For more details, see the PPT presentation and the documents below:

 

**The synthesis report of the summaries submitted by the WG members**

Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) pointed out that only half of the WG members submitted their answers to the following questions:

1. The main challenges the EHEA is facing taking into account the major political, economical, social and technological developments;
2. The extent to which the  EHEA Structural Reforms are suitable to address those challenges and the way those reforms can be reinforced as well as;
3. The main political goals of the Bologna Process of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Fr. Bechina shortly presented the synthesis of the responses and highlighted that most of the summaries were status-quo reports. While analysing the list of challenges of 2012, they proved to differ from the ones in 1999.

The challenges were divided into two groups - external and internal. Financial and economic crisis was mentioned as an external challenge and HE was identified as one of the means to overcome the crisis. The other challenges, which EHEA is facing, brought up in the country summaries are as follows:

* Further development of the societies with the higher education being the major contributor:
* Demographic problems and the way the universities can contribute to the issue;
* Growing diversity, multiculturalism, which has to deal with mobility and migration;
* Global solidarity which is to support in their reformation process countries undergoing reformation processes within and outside the EHEA;
* New leadership and participation (academic autonomy);
* The balance between regulations and transparency tools, mobility and stability and the ways to achieve it;
* Lack of common understanding of various instruments.

*In the discussion that followed the analysis, certain issues and concerns were raised regarding*

* the way the players on different level interact ;
* the way the Bologna fundamental principles are connected with the challenges and the way to strengthen that link;
* the relevance of the Bologna purposes; in particular the structural reforms have to be carried out having in mind of the changing aspect of the challenges.
* participation of stakeholders as a crucial factor which is missing at present;
* the new forms of learning, including open educational resources, should be tackled;
* the results of QA processes are not obvious, and in many cases the HE system lacks funding and incentives;
* distinguishing between long-term and short-term goals, for their better interpretation and implementation at national and European levels;
* the role of higher education in 2020.

**The main objectives of the Structural Reforms WG, challenges ahead, working methodology and the expectations towards the WG members**

Noël Vercruysse introduced the main objectives and challenges of the WG. He underlined that the implementation of these reforms is uneven, and there is different interpretation of the existing tools. Thus, while developing policy proposals the WG should take into account the changing context of higher education, interconnection of the various reforms and their elements, relevance and acceptance of the reforms.

During the discussion, WG members underlined that it was important:

* To keep the bridge between policy and implementation, to tackle the transversal aspect of different tools;
* To enhance the development of specific tools and their coherence in the respective four areas by avoiding being too generic, try clearly define the expectations from these tools while approaching the issue from realistic point of view;
* To ensure the acceptance of the tools which is vital for their proper use;
* To further improve the implementation of accreditation systems;
* To stick to the existing policy areas by further bridging the gaps within the EHEA implementation. Various mechanisms are to be used for mapping these gaps e.g. peer review.
* To keep the alignment between the overarching framework of QF-EHEA and EQF for lifelong learning, assist in developing common understanding of different levels of QF-EHEA, which is essential for recognition of the qualifications;
* To develop a common understanding and meaningful implementation of learning outcomes throughout Europe in order to ensure the success of the following interdependent tools-ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance;
* To ensure more a supportive environment for academic staff;
* To improve stakeholder cooperation;
* To foster the employability, improve the provision, accessibility and quality of guidance on careers and employment.

**Break out sessions on the main four main policy areas, developments and challenges related them (Qualification Frameworks, Quality Assurance, Recognition, Transparency)**

For further coherent identification of the core issues in the four areas the WG was split into four sub-groups. Each group had a chair, a facilitator and rapporteur (See annex attached).

1. Session on Qualifications Frameworks (QFs)

The purpose of this sub-group was identifying challenges and issues of the QFs for the coming 3 years. The key issues identified by the members for discussion were as follows:

* Methods of defining learning outcomes i.e. subject specific and generic competences, their place in frameworks, more detailed descriptors for each discipline/subject areas; learning outcomes vs. workload (expressed in ECTS credits); translating learning outcomes into study programmes and curricula; using learning outcomes to bridge with QA, recognition etc.; development of learning outcomes as an integral part of structural reforms and developing a common understanding of learning outcomes throughout Europe and across various strands of education;
* Ways to quality assure learning outcomes, in particular, ensuring that they exist not only on paper, but also in practice;
* The role and place of short cycle qualifications within the QF-EHEA;
* The placement and referencing of secondary school leaving qualifications giving access to higher education;
* Preparation of the self-certification and referencing reports through which the competent authorities of a country demonstrate the compatibility of their framework with the QF-EHEA and EQF, addressing the surfacing issues of QFs such us “empty” levels, etc.;

Detailed information is given in the documents below.

 

1. Session on Quality Assurance (QA)

The main purpose of the session was to identify the QA issues which should be covered with the WG activities focusing also on relation with other main areas of the Structural Reforms. The key issues purposed by the members for discussion were as follows:

* “Bologna Triangle: QF-QA-Recognition” – developments in QA needed in order to improve coherent implementation of Bologna reforms, help QFs and learning outcomes work in practice, facilitate recognition of qualifications;
* Finding good methods to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures;
* Revision of the European Standard and Guidelines in order to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness;
* Raising the level of EQAR’s recognition in national legislation across EHEA as well as in the context of cooperation worldwide, mainly in order to improve mutual trust between national HE systems;
* Relations between Quality Assurance and the logics of a market;
* A need to ensure quality while addressing dilemmas of mass higher education;
* Quality assurance of Joint Programmes;
* Purposes and implications of Quality Assurance

Detailed information is given in the documents below.

 

1. Session on Transparency.

The main purpose of the session was to identify and discuss the most important issues related to transparency tools including rankings and classifications. The key issues made by the members were as follows:

1. The growing needs for transparency and accountability among all stakeholders;
2. The need to obtain valid information on higher education across borders;
3. Ways of improving transparency of diversity and means for ensuring sufficient transparency of the diversity in EHEA;
4. Lack of evidence-based transparency instruments, such as study guides, rankings; traditional rankings and CHE-ranking, typologies and classifications, annual reports and accounts, national student surveys, Bologna tools, etc.;
5. Development of a common European transparency framework including;
   1. The main characteristics of a higher education system;
   2. The programme specifications and key elements;
   3. A general framework for demonstrating the quality of a programme to students, employers, policy-makers and the general public;
   4. A general framework for presenting evidence-based information about the performances: employability, time to graduation, the achieved learning outcomes, etc.;
6. Means to encourage HEIs to collect evidence and to report their progress in improving the quality of their teaching and education as well as their outcomes;

Detailed information is given in the documents below.

 

1. Session on Recognition

The main purpose of this session was to identify the main issues and challenges related to Recognition.

During the session the participants were asked a set of questions, which have not been within the focus till present. By this, and setting the scene for the further work of the WG in the field of Recognition, the sub-group tried to identify more general aim, purpose and end of “recognition”, its conditions within legal or cultural backgrounds, its political impact and interdependency with other policy areas within the Bologna Process, especially with the other key issues of the WG (Quality assurance, Qualifications frameworks, and Transparency).

The key issues purposed by the members for discussion were as follows:

1. ***The concept and end of “Recognition”;***

* The purpose of and need for better recognition;
* The essential links of “recognition” with “academic degrees”;
* “Hidden agenda” of recognition issues;

1. ***The interdependency between “recognition” and other major issues of the Bologna Process;***

* The means, instruments, political goals etc. within the Bologna Process supporting fair recognition and factors conflicting with the goal of fair recognition;

***3. Recognition outside EHEA***

Detailed information is given in the documents below.

 

Bartłomiej Banaszak summarized the discussion on the main objectives of the WG held in the plenary and breakout sessions. He underlined that the group has managed to achieve a common understanding on the main goals related to improving interlinkages between the main policy areas and coherence in implementation of structural reforms. He also expressed the opinion that although the topic of links with transversal issues, i.a. employability, was underlined just in one report from the breakout session, the overall impression from the plenary discussion allows for the conclusion that this issue should be perceived as an important objective of the WG activities.

**Information provided by Secretariat**

The second day of the meeting was launched by a brief presentation of the head of BFUG Secretariat, Gayane Harutyunyan, on the main outcomes of the first meetings on the EHEA WGs.

**Draft Terms of Reference for Structural Reforms WG**

Sjur Bergan presented the draft terms of reference of the EHEA WG on Structural Reforms and noted that the draft should be kept as simple as possible and reflect the main objectives of the WG. The WG members made their suggestions to be included in the ToR and the document was amended accordingly.

For more details please see the document below:



The second meeting of the WG will be held on 22-23 May 2013. The Co-Chairs announced that the WG will aim at defining transversal topics for the most part of its work and seek to avoid establishing sub-groups for each policy area. It was suggested to consider the feasibility of having a joint meeting together with the EQF Advisory Group; a meeting in Brussels on September 24 – 25 could possibly include a joint session of up to a half day.

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|  | **Quality Assurance** | **Qualification Frameworks** | **Recognition** | **Transparency** |
| **Chair** | Bartłomiej Banaszak | Sjur Bergan | Fr. Friedrich Bechina | Noël Vercruysse, |
| **Facilitator** | Achim Hopbach | Bryan Maguire | Carita Blomqvist | Noël Vercruysse, |
| **Rapporteurs** | Mark Frederiks | Erzsébet Szlamka | Kevin Guillaume | Aurelija Valeikienė |
| **The participants of the sub-groups** | Yana Dimitrova Yotova | Anita Krémó | Regina Aichner, | Dr. Birger Hendriks |
|  | Christos Skouras | Allan Bruun Pedersen | Ana Tecilazić Goršić | Frank Petrikowski |
|  | Patricia Pol | Nevena Vuksanović | Inês Vaz Pinto Almeida Vasques Branco | Bugaian Larisa |
|  | Colin Tück | Selma Memic | Gayane Harutyunyan | Ivan Babyn |
|  | Karin Åmossa | Banu Narbekova | Tia Loukkola | Magalie Soenen |
|  | Carolyn Campbell | Ani Hakobyan |  |  |

Annex 1

1. Curaj, A., Scott, P., Vlasceanu, L., & Wilson, L. (Eds.). (2012). *European higher education at the crossroads: between the Bologna Process and national reforms*. Springer. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)