**EHEA Working Group on Structural Reforms**

**Third meeting, Brussels, 24-25 September, 2013**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

List of participants:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Name*** | ***Country / Organisation*** |
| Noël Vercruysse, (Co-Chair) | Belgium/Flemish Community |
| Bartłomiej Banaszak (Co-Chair) | Poland |
| Padre Friedrich Bechina (Co-Chair) | Holy See |
| Marzia Foroni (Co-Chair of the 3rd cycle ad-hoc WG) | Italy |
| Arkadi Papoyan | Armenia |
| Regina Aichner | Austria |
| Yana Yotova | Bulgaria |
| Věra Šťastná | Czech Republic |
| Allan Bruun Pedersen | Denmark |
| Carita Blomqvist | Finland |
| Olaf Bartz | Germany |
| Christos Skouras | Greece |
| Erzsébet Szlamka | Hungary |
| Bryan Maguire | Ireland |
| Aurelija Valeikienė | Lithuania |
| Mark Frederiks | The Netherlands |
| Priscilla Couto | Portugal |
| Sara Bringle | Sweden |
| Metin Toprak | Turkey |
| Canan Unvan | Turkey |
| Carolyn Campbell | United Kingdom |
| Isabel Rohner | BUSINESSEUROPE |
| Frank Petrikowski | European Commission |
| Anita Krémó | European Commission |
| Karin Åmossa | Educational International |
| Achim Hopbach | ENQA |
| Colin Tück | EQAR |
| Nevena Vuksanović | ESU |
| Michael Gaebel | EUA |
| Nina Kind | EUA |
| Stefan Delplace | EURASHE |
| Gayane Harutyunyan | BFUG Secretariat |
| Ani Hakobyan | BFUG Secretariat |

Apologies were received from the Sjur Bergan (Council of Europe), the Co-Chair of the Structural Reforms WG and from Croatia, France, Moldova, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine.

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

Noël Vercruysse (Belgium/Flemish Community) the hosting Co-Chair welcomed the participants to the 3rd meeting of the EHEA WG on Structural Reforms (hereinafter SRWG) and briefed the WG members on the main topics of the meeting: it primarily will focus on developing the structure of SRWG draft report to be submitted by the end of 2014 as well as on the Qualifications Frameworks (QFs). In addition the Co-Chair noted that the joint meeting with EQF Advisory Group will take place on the second day of the meeting which will be devoted to the QFs and their key role in the reforms of the national HE systems.

**Information and updates on the developments of relevance to SRWG**

***Feedback on the Rome Co-Chairs meeting, 8 July 2013:*** Padre Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) noted that due to the big size and the complex structure of the SRWG a coordination meeting with its sub-structures was required for the purpose of exchanging views, getting updates on their work, also providing assistance if needed. During the Rome meeting it was concluded that reports of the sub-structures will be enclosed to the main report of the SRWG trying to follow the structure and its logic. Moreover, it was noted that in the remaining period, the SRWG need to concentrate on the outcomes to be produced and later reported at the Yerevan ministerial meeting. Therefore the Co-Chairs have developed the first outline of the report, which will enable to structure the further discussions of the WG and identify the major issues in each policy area of the structural reforms. In conclusion it was also stressed that there is a need to define the final goal and the purposes of the instruments enabling policy makers to link them with the overall goals and purposes of HE.

***The BFUG Board meeting in Tbilisi, 17 September, 2013:*** Gayane Harutyunyan (the Head of Secretariat) informed that the BFUG Board met on the 17 of September in Tbilisi and for the first time streamlined reporting from the overarching WGs was conducted covering the activities of their sub-structures. The Board stressed that there is a necessity for greater coherence between the different policy areas and the data, which will provided by the Implementation WG, is essential in endeavour to reach it. Hence the Implementation WG was asked to present the structure of the report earlier, at the Athens BFUG meeting, rather than in July 2014 as it is planned. Regarding the scorecards indicators it was noted that until November 2013 the WGs are able to identify new scorecards though it is important to take into consideration the process oriented nature of the scorecards in case they are developed. The 2015 Implementation Report should be a mirroring instrument reflecting the actual situation across EHEA. The issue of NQF network participation was another topic that was highlighted and the need reconsider the role of the networks was raised. In conclusion it was noted that Georgia has expressed its interest to participate in SRWG.

***Conference on quality assurance trust and recognition, September 20, 2013 Brussels:*** Noël Vercruysse shared information on the conference organised by the Flemish Community recently on the topic of trust, quality assurance and recognition in the global perspective. The participants were both from EU and other regions of the world. Afterwards the Co-Chair added that the detailed information on the conference will be available on the European Commission website and in brief presented several suggestions made during the conference in relevance to SRWG activities:

* To improve the student experience and learning in HE with the help of continuous enhancement of QA.
* To reinforce the cooperation between HEIs and trans-regional cooperation of QA agencies.
* To consider quality as one of the important pillars for creating trust and confidence across the EHEA.
* To achieve common understanding on different structural elements and concepts, i.e. what is quality, what are the core elements of a robust QA systems, how to define the LOs for curriculum design and etc.
* To better articulate the important role of LOs while considering the interrelationship of QFs and QA.
* To move from policy to the implementation on the ground floor (institutions, academics), support the learners and academic staff to make the shift to LOs.
* To seek opinion of employers and alumnus in order to maintain and improve the relevance and quality of study programmes.
* QFs and QA are interconnected and both can contribute to make the diversity more transparent and more understandable.

In conclusion the Co-Chair informed that the Flemish Ministry intends to organise peer learning activities on the following topics.

* New methods of QA in HE;
* Pilot projects on joint degrees and work placements mostly on the level of students.



**Subsidiary text to the LRC convention: “Recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications.”**

Carita Blomqvist (Finland) briefed on the purpose of the recommendation, which mainly is to support the implementation of LRC principles in different countries. The document is kind of compromise of different views i.e. ENIC-NARIC network, EQF AG etc. The purpose of the work was to bring these two policy areas closer together as there are countries where these 2 policy areas have been developed separately. In addition it was noted that main idea of the subsidiary text is to show how QFs can support the fair recognition of foreign qualifications and how to benefit from the existing tools.

For more details see the document below.



In the discussion the following suggestions were made:

* Further to promote the implementation and the usage of EAR Manual in HEIs;
* The draft final report of the SRWG should contain a strong recommendation on supporting the EAR Manual;
* To establish more formal links between Asia-Pacific (Tokyo) and Lisbon Recognition Conventions, to evolve the trans-regional cooperation based on these conventions;
* To look for the possibility to minimize the market influence on QA agencies: some QA agencies adopt strategies that are market oriented and are designed for international cooperation;
* To better communicate on the interlinkages between QFs and QA and the way they support each other, also their role in recognition;
* To better analyse the issue of trust between the QA systems and their impact on recognition.

**European Approach for Accreditation of Joint Degrees**.

Achim Hopbach (ENQA) in general introduced the objective beyond nominating the experts group to develop the European Approach for Accreditation of joint degrees, i.e. the to come up with European approach which will facilitate the accreditation of joint degrees in the EHEA. The main message was that this approach should be applied only to those programmes which are the subject to compulsory accreditation; this is not a proposal for additional accreditation scheme for those countries which do not have any. In the summary of the document it is highlighted that the remaining obstacles for setting up joint degrees are different national legislations and heterogeneity of external QA systems. Moreover, it is recommended to left out the national specifications as they inhibit the accreditation of the joint degrees and to facilitate the accreditation process by using already existing tools in EHEA i.e. QFs, ECTS, DS, ESG, etc.

For more details see the document below



The observations made during the discussion are presented below.

* In response to the inquiry on what is the option of HEIs representing countries which do not have accreditation of joint programmes it was noted that the document has been elaborated to ease the programme accreditation where it is compulsory/required, to reduce the burden for accreditation where it is possible.
* As for the review panel rules, whether a standard/ regulations are required in here, to what extent the paper should define the set of recommendations for the panel it was explained that strictness of the criteria are important in order to stimulate national authorities to accept decisions of the of non-national EQAR registered QA agencies, yet it may seem contradicting to the already existing practices.
* It was highlighted that for further enhancement of recognition of joint degrees it is advisable to stick to the description of a review panel as suggested in the paper.
* Need for better articulation of LRC use and consultation with the ENIC-NARIC network in order to identify good practices in recognition of joint degrees.
* The type of qualifications to be awarded is important for students.
* Description of recognition procedures (academic and professional) of joint degrees are still to be tackled.
* The importance of a single accreditation procedure for joint degrees on one hand and the extent to which joint degrees are preferable to double degrees, single accreditation procedure to joint accreditation on the other hand:
* The openness and simplicity of the European approach in comparison with the national standards was questioned.
* Countries should consider taking away the barriers for institutions in setting up joint programmes.
* The sensitive issue of teaching in national language should be further considered.
* In addition, the WG members agreed to further comment on the European Approach of Accreditation of Joint degrees. The Experts group will revise the document accordingly and circulate to the WG members. Meanwhile, the WG members are invited to send additional comments to the Experts Group by mail.

**Presentation on doctoral studies**

Marzia Foroni (Co-Chair of the 3rd cycle Ad-hoc WG, Italy) updated the participants on the activities carried out by the sub-group and in short introduced the main eight tasks to the SRWG, i.e. stocktaking, mapping diversity, quality assurance which also incorporates set of ideas for ESG, transparency covering set of ideas for ECTS revision, internationalization and mobility, employability, funding and link between 2nd and 3rd cycle, how to increase the research in the 2nd cycle, whether there is enough money for improving the data of the doctoral studies.

For more detailed information see the ppt below.



**Presentation of the first outline of the report and the work plan**

The Co-Chair Bartłomiej Banaszak briefed the WG members on the aim of the report and its further development. It was noted that the task of the SRWG is rather challenging as on one hand it has to make policy recommendations in the 4 areas and on the other hand it also has a mandate to address the number of overarching issues under its mandate. In addition to the task mentioned the balance between policy recommendations and implementation is to be achieved. SRWG has also to avoid any overlaps with work of other WGs particularly, with Implementation WG.

Afterwards the structure of the report was presented highlighting its main chapters. Last but not least it was stressed that the Co-Chairs explore the possibility of getting some additional data on self-certification and implementation of the LRC on national levels.

For more detailed information see the document below



The suggestions and remarks made during the discussion are the following:

* Better examine the cost effect on both implementation and non implementation of the structural reforms in HE, stimulate countries/organizations to commission research estimating costs of non implementation vs. implementation of HE reforms.
* Indicate the link between purposes/goals of the structural reforms and the efforts to be taken to achieve them.
* Analyse the challenges rather than problems to the implementation.
* Emphasise the cross references between policy areas of the structural reforms also assess the influence of each policy area on the others.
* Describe the latest developments of the existing tools of different policy areas and the way they communicate.
* To change the paragraph title of “Overarching issues” to “Overarching political issues” as diverse aspects are tackled in the content.
* Joint degrees should be in the last chapter rather than in the QA chapter.
* To take into account the possible discrepancies that may arise between the recommendations of the SRWG and final data of the Implementation WG. Try to interpret those issues, check recommendations in the light of the existing data collected by the Implementation WG, though the timing is an issue.
* To write policy considerations which actually correspond the ever-changing context of economic reality rather than HE, to mention the economic dimension.
* To develop timetable reflecting the main EHEA WGs activities and the actual deadlines aiming to better coordinate the process.
* To propose evidence based recommendations in the final report in order to secure the ministries to step forward.
* Use more transparent language/be more explicit while addressing the concept of LOs, i.e. usage of programme design, curriculum developments, staff developments, assessment rather than LOs term.
* Ensure more supportive environment for academic staff and enhance student involvement in QA.
* Better communicate with ENIC-NARC network and utilise the data in the network possession regarding recognition.
* To make clear the differentiation between the four policy areas, instruments, purposes and the objectives that the SRWG is striving for.
* The report should be comprehensive and concise complementing other report of the EHEA WGs reports.

As a concluding remark the Co-Chairs noted the need for commissioning research on exploring the correspondence of national legislations with the main principles of LRC and the status-quo of the self-certification reports. The outline of the draft final report will be revised and presented to the WG for consideration at its December meeting.

**Feedback of the EHEA Structural Reform Working Group for the Work Program of the Activities on the Peer Learning and Review Initiative**

Bartłomiej Banaszak (Poland) in short introduced the draft work program of activities on the PL &RI. Afterwards WG were invited to the introduction of new proposals and the following initiatives were expressed.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No. | Policy areas | Topics | Hosted/organized by |
| 1 | 3rd cycle | One of the specific aspects of the 3rd cycle | Most probably Italy |
| 2 | Learning outcomes | Attainment of defined LO | The Netherland/EURASHE (2014) |
| 3 | Promotion of structural reforms outside of EHEA |  | Ireland (2014, second half) |
|  | SRs and employability | Links between the SRs and employability,  Involving the employers in shaping the curriculum of the study programmes. | Polish ministry (2015) |

In addition the Secretariat briefed the WG members that starting from the 2014 the European Commission will be provide funding to the countries wishing to organise peer learning activity on one of the themes if BFUG approves the submitted proposal.

**Further work plan of EHEA WG on SRs, next meeting of the, 9-10 December, Ghent.**

The Co-Chairs noted that SRWG has rather extensive agenda for its next meeting, yet the main emphasis of the WG will be on elaborating the draft final report of the WG. In relation to the report it was also stressed that it is important to ensure that all the specific tasks of the SRWG are not overlooked and covered properly. As to the topics to be included in the further work plan of the WG, the following points were highlighted.

* Discussion on revised ESG after the joint session with the BFUG;
* Revised European Approach of accreditation of joint degrees ;
* Learning outcomes and the way they are interpreted,
* Supporting environment for the academic staff and the students.

*The forth meeting of the SRs WG will be held in Ghent, 9-10 December 2013.*