**EHEA Working Group on Structural Reforms**

**5th Meeting, Rome, 10-11 March 2014**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

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| --- | --- |
| ***Name*** | ***Country / Organisation*** |
| Sjur Bergan, (Co-Chair) | Council of Europe |
| Noël Vercruysse, (Co-Chair) | Belgium/Flemish Community |
| Bartłomiej Banaszak, (Co-Chair) | Poland |
| Padre Friedrich Bechina, (Co-Chair) | Holy See |
| Marzia Foroni | Italy |
| Arkadi Papoyan | Armenia |
| Regina Aichner | Austria |
| Kevin Guillaume | Belgium/French Community |
| Yana Dimitrova Yotova | Bulgaria |
| Ana Tecilazić Goršić | Croatia |
| Věra Šťastná | Czech Republic |
| Allan Bruun Pedersen | Denmark |
| Patricia Pol | France |
| Héléne Lagier | France |
| Julia Gonzales | Holy See |
| Karolina Kasperaviciutė | Holy See |
| Riccardo Cinquegrani | Holy See |
| Fr. Franco Imoda | Holy See |
| Carita Blomqvist | Finland |
| Elene Jibladze | Georgia |
| Olaf Bartz | Germany |
| Erzsébet Szlamka | Hungary |
| Bryan Maguire | Ireland |
| Kymbat Beisekina | Kazakhstan |
| Rimma Seidakhmetova | Kazakhstan |
| Aurelija Valeikienė | Lithuania |
| Mark Frederiks | The Netherlands |
| Inês Vaz Pinto Almeida Vasques Branco | Portugal |
| Sara Bringle | Sweden |
| Vincenzo Ribi | Switzerland |
| Mehmet Durman | Turkey |
| Canan Ünvan | Turkey |
| Carolyn Campbell | United Kingdom |
| Frank Petrikowski | European Commission |
| Anita Krémó | European Commission |
| Karin Åmossa | Educational International |
| Padraig Walsh | ENQA |
| Colin Tück | EQAR |
| Fernando Miguel Galán Polomares | ESU |
| Tia Loukkola | EUA |
| Stefan Delplace | EURASHE |
| Gayane Harutyunyan | Head of the BFUG Secretariat |
| Ani Hakobyan | BFUG Secretariat |

*Apologies were received from Moldova and Greece.*

**Welcome and introduction to the meeting (Bechina)**

Padre Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) the hosting Co-Chair welcomed the participants to the 5th meeting of the SRWG in Rome, noted that participation is high and provided some general information on organizational matters.

**Adoption of the Agenda**

The draft agenda has been adopted with 2 minor changes related to the points 5 and 9.

**Adoption of the draft minutes of the third meeting of the EHEA WG on SRs**

The draft minutes were endorsed unanimously.

**Information and updates**

Gayane Harutyunyan, the Head of the Secretariat informed the members about intense discussions’ results of the Astana Board meeting highlighting that during the meeting the EC drew the Board’s attention on the future of the Bologna Process. It was stressed that several EHEA countries and stakeholders raised a concern that the Bologna Process seems to be losing momentum and relevance to the national agendas despite the significant progress documented in the Implementation Reports. Nevertheless, there are still fundamental issues in the Bologna Process that needs further implementation.

**Feedback on the activities of the main overarching BFUG WGs and sub-structures.**

Ani Hakobyan, the member of the BFUG Secretariat, provided updates on the main overarching groups of the BFUG and noted that all WGs at present are in the stage of developing their reports for submiting to BFUG.

Marzia Foroni (Italy), the Co-Chair of the ***3rd cycle WG*** briefed on the timetable of the WG and added that the first outline of its report has already been developed. At the next meeting the WG will also finalize its contribution to the SRWG’s report including some policy proposals for improvement of employability of the Ph.D students.

The WG was informed that the next Steering Board meeting of the ***RPL Network*** will be held on 9-11 April, 2014 and the WG will draft its recommendations, which will later be submitted to the SRWG.

The ***network of NQF correspondents*** has developed good cooperation with the national contact of the EQF Advisory Board and will held its next joint meeting on April 11, 2014 in Athens. The issue of attendance within the Network was brought up at the BFUG and Board meetings several times; moreover a call for appointment of the countries’ national representatives to the network was made. Despite all the measures taken it is evident that the interest in the network is too low.

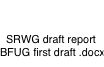
Allan Bruun Pedersen (Denmark) provided information on the ***Pathfinder Group on the Automatic Recognition***. He informed that at the present stage the group is investigating the possibilities of widening the regional cooperation as a mean to improve recognition and to achieve automatic recognition. It was noted that based on the results of the survey carried out among 80 universities on their institutional recognition practices at master level it became clear that the practices are rather diverse, obstacles to automatic recognition in some cases are conceptual and that proper usage of the Bologna tools is lacking. The group had specifically discussed the relevance of the DS and the possibility of revising and digitalizing it.

Sjur Bergan (CoE) the Co-Chair of the SRWG provided feedback on the ***International conference on “Bologna Structural Reforms, experience, problems and prospects” held on 13-14 February, 2014*** in Astana. The conference was notable for its high participation: around 100 participants mainly representing Kazakh HEIs and international experts. The conference took stock of the Kazakh higher education developments.

**Presentation of the first draft report of the Structural Reforms WG**

Sjur Bergan (CoE) introduced the first draft report of the SRWG and thanked the members for their contributions on specific issues of the report. He mentioned that the draft report is comprehensive and written in a classical manner. It has been previously presented to the BFUG Board attention and despite of the fact that the feedback was generally positive two main messages were received regarding its structure: a) importance to focus on several key points the and contain a limited number of policy recommendations aimed at putting the structural reforms on the policy agenda of the EHEA and reinforcing the Bologna Process; b) the SRWG does not need to cover each item of the ToR explicitly in the report. Afterwards the Chair briefly presented the timetable of the WG and noted that in case of a need to rework on the draft report after the BFUG Rome meeting an extra meeting might be required, which will most probably be held around December 15-16 in Brussels.

For more details see the document below:



Following comments were made during the discussion:

* The report and the way all crosscutting issues were reflected in it was welcomed.
* It is necessary to be more explicit on the target group of the report and avoid technicalities as much as possible making the report readable.
* It is fairly fundamental challenge on the one hand to come up with recommendations which are implementation oriented and on the other hand being more relevant to the political agenda: policy recommendations are most definitely needed to attract the ministers’ attention.
* It was acknowledged that one of the key challenges is to identify responsible authorities to coordinate communication of the four policy areas.
* As far as SRWG is not in charge of implementing but rather designing and proposing policies hence its better suggesting policy recommendations focused on improving implementation.
* It was noted that HEIs are the platform where implementation takes place hence there is a need to focus more on institutions and the way numerous tools are interpreted by them.
* It will be welcomed if the report put more emphasis on the way different tools interact to promote the EHEA.
* Its necessary to strive for a reasonable balance between the need to adapt implementation to specific situation of each country and still ensure that this implementation can lead to so called coherent EHEA.
* It was agreed to make the introduction of the report more explicit and political, to strengthen the background and the rationale for the SRs as well as to concentrate more on the concepts.
* It was suggested to make more evident the connection between the EHEA and ERA and to ensure that EHEA structures are the basis for the ERA.
* Regarding new recommendation on the LRC and the way QFs can support the recognition of qualifications, it was noted that: a) there is a need to strengthen the participation and consultation of appropriate networks in the Bologna Process to enhance recognition; b) national authorities can assist more active participation of recognition communities in the national policy making; c) while developing this recommendation it became clear that there are still member states which are not familiar with the self-certification and referencing processes: discussion should be proposed whether the processes fit their purpose; d) QFs will help to limit the differences between qualifications that might be considered as substantial; e) countries should be committed to provide clear and updated information on their national systems’/QFs stage of development.
* A question was raised on recognition for employment and increasing draw on the soft use of the QFs.

*In regard to ”* ***Transparency and diversity” paragraph (page 17)*** *of the report following notices were made:*

* On the issue of protecting perspective students from fraudulent and/or dishonest information it was suggested either to raise awareness among the students, parents, employers or strengthen public responsibility to assess the information provided by education providers.
* Contradicting opinions were expressed on the matter of putting additional responsibility on public authorities to regulate fraudulent information spread by education suppliers.
* The idea related to making programme specifications suggested in the transparency framework (page 3) is rather challenging considering huge quantity and wide diversity of study programmes: e.g. Germany has about 50000 study programmes.
* In fact information provided by HEIs is not regulated by ESG, which may harm perspective students also in terms of first meaningful employment.
* It is important to make clear distinction between the terms of employability and employment.
* Finally it was noted that the report would refer to clear obligation of institutions to ESG to provide trustful and transparent information.

*After deliberations around the recommendation made at Irish presidency conference, the SRWG in general agreed upon developing compatible principles of QA across HE and VET, which will increase trust between these two sectors. Additionally it was noted that:*

* SRWG may make use of “Council conclusions on QA supporting education and training” document while making recommendation in the respective area.
* ESG and annex 3 to EQF Recommendation have to be compatible.
* Explicit links have to be expressed between ESG, EQF, QA principles and EQAR, as different communities are not aware of all these tools’ existence.
* The group was informed that currently EC is following up the interlinkages of structural reforms and transparency tools to analyse what kind of changes are necessary for EU tools. If urges need for any enhancement than most probably it will be not earlier than 2016.

**Presentation on structural reforms by Secretary General of one of the most internationalised Universities in Rome and by Director of the Staff Commission of the Holy See: their experience with the concrete issues and the usefulness/use of the tools existing within EHEA.**

The SRWG was honoured to host Mr (Secretary general) and Ms Maria (), who were invited to introduce their opinions on the Bologna Process (BP) and the extent to which they benefit from the EHEA tools.

Mr started his speech with a very positive note by emphasising his great enthusiasm on what the BP promises. However at the beginning it was a great challenge to present the study programmes of the university using newly developed transparency tools without loosing the vision to make the system understandable. At the beginning the university experienced certain difficulties while implementing QA arrangements mainly because of perceiving it as a control mechanism. Meanwhile the ECTS appeared rather helpful as many students wanted to continue their studies in other places. The next tool the speaker mentioned was the DS. Given the characteristics of Catholic education institutions this tool appeared less needed in the contrary to ECTS: mainly students coming from outside the Europe are not interested in having DS; in Italy there are regulations which work better than complicated form of the DS. In the conclusion Mr restated the usefulness of the BP and emphasised that opportunity to get into dialogue with the universities worldwide has increased due to the BP.

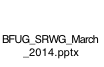
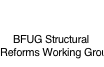
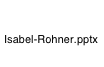
The next guest speaker Ms Maria .. welcomed all the participants and started the speech with introduction of her view on the features that are considered important when looking at certain qualifications. Nowadays it is more difficult to understand qualifications and their correspondence to concrete professions, as compared to 20 years earlier, which complicates allocation of human resources properly. QFs are useful as far as they make easier assessment of the individual skills and competencies. At the same time labour market needs rapid changes and one of the challenges of the QFs is to reflect these changes. Another topic that Ms Maria touched was collaboration of the academic world and enterprisers and the extent to which their alliance enhances employability. In this aspect students’ role was signified. In particular students need to understand the area where they can realise their full potential, better examine the labour market, to begin working on part-time basis while studying, etc.. Afterwards Ms Maria introduced some plans of the Holy See. Among them was the recent decision to requalify people with older qualifications: Holy See strongly encourages the ethical responsibility of employers.

**Employability and Structural Reforms.**

Bartłomiej Banaszak (Poland) the Co-Chair of the SRWG introduced the purpose of the morning session. According to the BFUG 2012-2015 work plan employability is a transversal issue and needs to be addressed by the four main overarching WGs of the BFUG. Therefore the concerns raised in the draft report are formulated from the point of view of the structural reforms. The report reflects on diverse interpretations of employability throughout EHEA and the importance to have common understanding on employability concept.

For the purpose of having structured and fruitful discussion the 4 stakeholder organisations, namely EUA, EURASHE, ESU, BUSINESSEUROPE together with Marzia Foroni (the Co-Chair of the third cycle WG) presented their perception on employability, the complexity of the concept, views on how they perceive the structural reforms enhance the employability.

For more details see the PPTs below:

The conclusions and suggestion made during the fruitful discussion on the topic are described below.

* Employability issue is really complex: including meaning and understanding of employability, balance between subject specific and soft skills, the value of the traineeships in the context of the regulated professions, involvement of the external experts in the programme design and the curriculum.
* It is worth focusing on the involvement of the stakeholders in the QA processes and not necessarily the most obvious stakeholders’ groups. In fact understanding of employability can be enhanced by involvement of governmental organizations.
* Institutional and potential graduates need to be made aware of the increasing value of the generic soft skills in the labour market.
* Another concern that was stressed is the communication problem among employers and students.
* SRWG report has to reflect on the distinction between employability and actual employment.
* Structures have to encourage LLL and make possible to respond to the challenges created by labour markets.
* It is necessary on the one hand to find ways to integrate internships in the 1st degree study programmes and on the other hand to avoid using the term “compulsory” while referring to integration of internships and employers in curriculum design: it may hurt autonomy of institutions.
* It will be beneficial to emphasise the extent to which specific tools have employment dimension.
* There is a need to have a passage on supportive environment in the SRWG report.
* Employability does not mean matching education and labour markets. It would be a mistake for the knowledge-based society to fully comply with the ever-changing context of the labour market while designing HE policies.
* The following obstacles on the way of meaningful first employment were indicated: a) first cycle degrees are rather new in the educational systems of many countries, b) dependency of the employability of the first cycle degree holders on the respective study fields.
* Distinguishing between internships and traineeships in the formal education from internships in the open market is needed.

Learning outcomes (LOs)

Noël Vercruysse (Belgium/Flemish community), the Co-Chair opened the session on LOs and emphasised the links the LOs’ role as a bridging element of all four policy areas. He stressed that there is a big diversity of qualifications in the EHEA and that LOs can be a solution for describing the use of the existing diversity. Moreover compatible structures may evolve into incompatible realities, the attractiveness of the EHEA will decrease if no common understanding is reached on LOs. The following comments were made during the discussion.

* There is a simplicity set on the usage of the LOs term while referring to multiple levels and granularity concept. As someone moves through different levels the purpose of using LOs changes.
* LOs are not key element of the EHEA by themselves; it’s worth indicating the interconnection of LOs with policy areas of the SRs. LOs approach is very important element in cross-referencing of the tools.
* There is a need to realise whether implementation of the LOs is seen as a bottom up or top down approach, not imposing the concept rather bringing its necessity into reality.
* The approach of definition of LOs as a methodology requires a mind shift.
* The report should state clearly that the development of the QF-EHEA is a change of paradigm; consequently more time is needed for its accurate implementation.
* There is a need to demonstrate the added value of having LOs for each cycle of HE.
* There is a requirement from policy makers side to assist in making LOs a major element in organisation and delivery of the HE outcomes.
* A question was raised on seeking possibilities a) to shorten the time required for adapting to the changing attitudes, b) to stimulate practices that will be developed in the same direction as uneven implementation of LOs can undo the common structures on paper.
* Consistency is one of the ways to succeed in changing attitudes.
* No practices have been found for the assessment of general and communication skills of the 3rd cycle graduates.
* National authorities have to provide incentives for proper implementation of the LOs.
* The added value of the LOs from structural perspective is provision of an opportunity to the students to obtain the same qualifications through different learning pathways.
* Organisation of PLA will be helpful in dissemination of LOs and stimulating public authorities to cooperate with institutions to reach common understanding and coherent implementation of LOs.
* There is a need to reinforce the NQF network.
* There is a need to develop a document, which will include a set of good practices.
* It will be essential that SRWG report reflect the meaningful role of LOs in internal QA of HEIs that the revised ESG gives. It will ultimately promote implementation at the institutional level.

**Presentation on the revised ECTS Users’ Guide**

Frank Petrikowski (EC) briefed on the agenda and composition of the ad-hoc WG on ECTS emphasising the stakeholders’ consultation where the revised the ECTS User’s guide was introduced.

The draft Guide gives substantial guidance to the HEIs and academics on programme design, which has a strong focus on the LOs. Also the Guide attempts to accommodate all types of the study mobility in addition to the issues like calculating and comparing grades, strengthening linkages with other transparency tools to reflect most recent developments within the BP.

In general participants were satisfied with the first draft of the Guide. However, it was suggestedof to further specify the purpose of the Guide and its target groups, to find the balance between flexibility and the extent to which the Guide has to be perspective, to clarify the formulations and etc.

After presentation of the core enhancements in the revised Guide a floor was given the SRWG members for the discussion.

* In response to the inquiry how the articulation of the work on the Guide have to be taken place, on what parts of the Guide SRWG is expected to comment it was clarified that the SWRG is welcomed to provide its comments up to the its finalization stage (May). Afterwards it will be presented to the SRWG for its consideration.
* It was noted that instead of having a separate chapter on ECTS and LLL, it is more reasonable to integrate LLL into issues around recognition.
* Old-fashioned style of some concepts, advantage of web-based information instead of detailed course catalogue was noted.
* It was stressed that differences in grading scales may hinder the recognition process, thus introduction of the grading system might be valuable for cooperation between partners, e.g. giving joint degrees.
* Relation between the LOs and the workload is important to develop also from the perspective of RPL .
* ECTS should focus more on traineeships and work-based learning, interrelation between ECTS and ECVET.

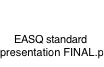
**Presentation on the European Area of Skills and Qualifications initiative.**

Anita Krémó (EC) gave information on the Consultation that have been launched towards the European area of skills and qualifications and underlined that this initiative aims to look at policies and tools promoting recognition, LLL and mobility and the extent to which these policies and tools are useful for the various stakeholders. Another objective is to collect the views of the stakeholders on the issues that students, employees face in regard to recognition of their qualifications and skills. It was also noted that there is a high unemployment rate, which coexist with over 2 million vacancies across the Europe, which illustrates that there is serious mismatch of skills in the labour market or/and a communication problem. The questionnaire includes closed and open questions, where both and individuals and organisations can comment. Additionally position papers are welcomed, allowing organisations and authorities to express more comprehensive views and detailed arguments.

Following issues were addressed to the SRWG members for consideration.

1. Whether there is a need for common principles of QA to be applied across HE and VET sectors.
2. Whether better synergies should be developed to improve the interlinkages between EQF and QF-EHEA and if yes what are the issues that have to be improved to broaden synergies, how and what can be done.
3. Finding ways of improving the synergies between the ECTS and the ECVET.
4. Challenges in regard to the recognition of the LOs coming from former systems.

For more details see the document below:



During the deliberations followed the presentation the following points were raised.

* There is a need to improve coherence of descriptors between the 3rd/ 8 level or clear explanation on the way to manage the differences has to be provided.
* It was indicated that the concern related to the lack of numeracy and literacy skills has to do with all levels of education.
* It was noted that the self-certification and referencing processes of the EQF and QF-EHEA carried in the same exercise prove the existing synergy.
* EHEA countries, which fall outside the remit of the EQF recommendation, should have mechanism of indicating the way their qualifications relate not just to the QF-EHEA but also the EQF.
* Considering this possibility to have one single point one should have in mind issues like academic identity and how strong and dear it is to people, in addition to the matter of ownership which may cause challenges of financing and administering it.
* Different patterns of implementation of the ECVET and the ECTS are explained by the differences of the cultures and objectives of the respective educational sectors.
* When doing single exercise countries have to explicitly reference to EQF and self-certify explicitly to QF-EHEA.
* What is done in Europe must be seen relevant to the rest of the world.
* It is important to build synergies by keeping ideology of each tool.

**Discussion on short cycle qualifications (SCQs) and their role and place in the overarching frameworks.**

Noël Vercruysse (Belgium/Flemish community) in short presented the rationale, role and place of SCQs in the main overarching frameworks and in different NQFs. It was noted that in some countries these qualifications are part of HE, in others are VET type of qualifications and in both cases are mainly referenced to EQF level 5. A question was raised whether the SRWG have to come up with a proposal to include SCQs within QF-EHEA. The response to this inquiry in general was positive in addition following ideas were expressed:

* The level 5 qualifications have an attribute of the both VET and HE sectors and inclusion of SCQs in QF-EHEA will increase permeability between them.
* It is important to emphasise the non-prescription aspect of integration SCQs: it is decision of each country whether to have or not SCQs within their HE systems, the assumption here is that not every qualification of EQF level 5 is a HE qualification, in fact recognition of SCQs within the QH-EHEA means recognising what is the current situation across the EHEA.
* SCQs are very successful and old, also useful as far as employability is concerned.
* The latest surveys shows that there is growing number of SCQs and non recognition will leave huge number of these qualifications out.
* There is a need to clearly state that SCQs are of non-mandatory nature and that VET qualifications which are referenced against EQF level 5 are not HE qualifications.

**Diploma Suppliment (DS)**

Sjur Bergan (CoE) stressed the importance of the DS as one of the most prominent transparency instruments under the LRC as well as part of the Europass developed jointly by EC/CoE/UNESCO. Two issues were brought to the attention of the group. One refers to the commitment of ministers in 2005, i.e. issuing DS automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language: the reality is that this is still far from realisation. The second issue concerns the need to reconsider this tool in the light of the recent EHEA developments.

In conclusion the Co-Chair suggested the WG to consider whether the report should recommend the ministers recommit to the task stated in 2005 and secondly realise whether there is a need to update this tool, if yes to seek the ways to do it despite the institutional complexity behind the process. The outcome of the discussion is illustrated below.

* Issuing the supplement not only after graduation but also within the studies can assist mobility.
* Some of the difficulties in regard to automatically issuing the DS exist due to the different interests of the stakeholders engaged, i.e. cost of issuing DS lies mainly on HEIs, regardless of the fact that beneficiaries are the students.
* In case a revision process is deemed necessary it will be useful to take into account the individualised aspect of the DS, moreover it may provide distinction between general information and individual component.
* Issuing DS for doctoral degree holders is practice spread in half of EHEA countries and reasons are various: a) autonomous choice of the countries, b) Erasmus-mundus pushes for issuing the DS. In case the SRWG will recommend extending the DS issuing also for the 3rd cycle it should indicate guidelines for the structure.
* Issuing serial number to the DS may overcome the obstacles connected with recognition.
* There is a need to assemble practices of various universities in order to analyse the cost effect of the DS for institutions and the way HEIs can benefit from this tool.
* Recent surveys prove that institutions are not using the DS for recognition purposes. Furthermore it was recorded that in most cases HEIs that issue DS consider it as an administrative document.
* DS doesn’t really transmit the obtained LOs even if its corresponds the format

**Next meeting of the EHEA SRWG, May 27-28**

*The sixth meeting of the SRWG will be held in Warsaw on May 27-28, 2014.*