

Notes of the third meeting of the Portability of Grants and Loans Working Group, 15-16 January 2007. Berlin, Germany

Those present:

Austria: Hermann Holubetz (HH); Eduard Galler (EG)
Belgium French Speaking Community: Isabelle De Keyzer (IDK)
Bologna Secretariat: Louis Ripley (LR. notes)
Croatia: Melita Kovacevic (MK)
Denmark: Hanna Dam (HD); Mia Wallin (MW)
England: Janet Coatsworth (JC)
ESIB: Nina Gustafsson Åberg (NGA)
European Commission: Jurgen Rienks (JR)
Finland: Leena Koskinen (LK)
Germany: Andreas Schepers (AS)
Ireland: Brian Power (BP)
Lithuania: Zivile Urbonaviciute (ZU)
Norway: Ida Andrén (IA); Hildrun Tyldum (HT)
Romania: Ion Ciuca (IC); Radu Damian (RD)
Scotland: Kathleen Robertson (KR)
Sweden: Linda Norman-Torvang (LNT)
The Netherlands: Aldrik in 't Hout (Chair); Marlies Leegwater (ML); Matyi Tegzess (MT)

Day 1: (Commenced 12:30)

1. Welcome, introductions and updates

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly those attending for the first time. The Chair asked members to introduce themselves and provide comments on the draft Agenda and any recent developments that had taken place in their respective countries.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Chair: A Bill is going through the Netherlands' Parliament which if passed will mean that full Portability will be available to eligible students world-wide, starting September 2007.
- KR: Scottish Ministers have approved a study on the feasibility of a pilot introducing Portability of higher education student support for students studying in a restricted number of countries. If feasible, the intention is to have a pilot scheme available to students for academic year 2010/11 at the latest.
- AS: New regulations planned to come into force in Germany later in 2007 would expand full Portability to all EU-member-states. It would be helpful if a section could be included in the group's Report to provide information on recent developments in Bologna partner countries. KR agreed.

- BP: Legislation is being prepared for introduction to the Irish parliament to unify the various existing student support grant schemes - it will also legally underpin portability arrangements.

It was agreed that:

The Agenda should be adopted.

The Report would include a Section on recent developments in respective member's countries. ML asked for contributions to be sent to the Chair by 1 February 2007.

2. Finalising the Report

The Chair asked for comments on the draft Report he had circulated.

During discussion the following points were made:

- EG mentioned that in Austria it is not possible to exchange data on students studying abroad with current data protection laws and this needed to be noted in the report.
- It would be a good idea to make use of existing expertise such as available at ENIC and NARIC. It was also mentioned that Eurydice will soon deliver a survey on all the Bologna countries.
- The Report should include a summary of the outcomes of the Berlin meeting, a general summary and the group's recommendations, as people often only read these sections.
- The benefits of the political and practical side of implementation should be combined in the practice of a future network. The mission of the network should not be looked at too narrowly and potential members should come from government policy departments and student support delivery agencies or authorities.
- An update from member countries on their state of portability would be helpful.

It was agreed that:

A number of comments on the content, layout and style of the draft were made. Those that were agreed were input into the Report after the end of the first day of the meeting. A revised draft was tabled for further comment at the start of the second day.

Day 2

Finalising the Report (continued)

After the group re-read the revised draft, the Chair asked for comments.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Certain areas of text were not cohesive. Issues raised in some parts did not correspond with the given solutions in later sections of the text. Also it needed to be stated that a number of Bologna countries, - non EC – were not affected in the same way. The Network was the major recommendation which needed to be placed after the conclusions section.
- It was discussed whether there was enough analysis on national legislation in non-EU/EEA countries. Some work had been carried out in this area. The Report should include a statement to this effect. ESIB offered to look into this subject further.
- An Executive Summary placed at the start would be helpful.
- There was an extensive emphasis in the EU Law section on the host country in relation to portability. The home country aspect needed to be emphasised more. Particularly for the lay reader who may not understand some of the technical points.
- It would be helpful to select three specific issues for the network to address. This would be helpful for Ministers to focus upon.

It was agreed that:

Following further discussion the Chair would reconsider Part 2 of the EU Law Section, possibly combine the two parts into one and expand the text in what was presently the second part. JR would check certain sections of the text (particularly pages 20/21) with EU colleagues. Several stylistic suggestions were made which would be incorporated. The Report would be redistributed to the group to ensure their comments on the revised text, particularly on Chapter 6 would be incorporated as appropriate.

- *The further revised draft would be sent out on 1 February*
- *Comments back to the Chair please by 15 February*
- *New version to be distributed by the Chair by 26 February*

3. Preview on the future: what will the network do? Who will participate?

Aim of the network:

To facilitate the implementation of portability grants and loans in order to promote mobility. This will be instrumental for the relevant authorities who deal with student support.

The outcome should make work easier for the national authorities concerned with the disbursing of support abroad.

Tasks:

- Share experience
- Structure information needed for implementation
- Provide an electronic platform for (public) information, as part of the Bologna Follow Up Group information infrastructure (not a working group or public service)
- Reach practical, multilateral, co-operative outcomes on specific issues beginning with those identified and agreed by the working group e.g.:
 - confirmation of registered higher education institutions between countries
 - equivalence of higher education qualifications and courses between countries
 - exchange of information on support systems entitlement of students
 - Minimising of double payments
 - Help to facilitate repayment of loans
 - Etc.... (open for (concrete!) suggestions!) Consider a limited pilot for the Network to establish how it will function in practice?

- Pave the way for legal and administrative multilateral solutions
- Meet periodically (at least annually) to share experiences and maintain momentum
- Produce a progress report to the Bologna Follow Up Group in 2009
- Consideration to be given to how the Network might be used to share information on the recovery of loans
- Consider task forces to develop knowledge on specific issues and share findings through the network

Participants:

Experts on student support systems, both experts on implementation and delivery and on policy.

It was agreed that the proposed mode of operation would be:

- *The network would be a long term structure*
- *Open to all Bologna partners that feel the need to participate*
- *Chaired and co-ordinated by a joint effort of three countries Providing (after London Ministers Conference) the opportunity for all Bologna partners to participate*

- *The day to day management (not policy) of the e-platform to be the responsibility of the Bologna Secretariat 2007-2009? This would need to be checked with Ministers.*
- *The joint chairs stimulate and ensure the tasks identified to be done are carried out, involving existing infra- structures as much as possible, for instance the Bologna structure and the ENIC-NARIC network*
- *Thematic approach: issues identified to be taken up by small groups of countries*
- *New issues would be taken up after a round of open information on the specific issue and suggestions regarding participants in an ad-hoc group to suggest possible multilateral solutions*
- *Information for students to be the responsibility of national administrations. Not the Network*

4. Contribution to the Communiqué: representing our work and recent ambition

After discussion the following draft was agreed:

“Following on the outcome of the working group on portability of grants and loans, which demonstrates the necessity to assist each other with the implementation of portable grants and loans, Ministers agree on the establishment of a network of national experts which will facilitate the portability of grants and loans within the EHEA as well as help to identify and address obstacles, as appropriate.”

5. Any Other Business

Ida Andrén asked for comments on a current residency case in Norway. The Chair asked if she could provide some further information on the case to see if a contribution is appropriate. This was agreed

TO DO LIST

By 1 February

- Countries express willingness to participate in chairing the network
- Countries report progress on their portability of grants and loans system.
- Countries formulate concrete suggestions for specific issues for the network. As concrete as possible to formulate a “top three” to be first addressed by the network.
- NL provides new version of the report taking into account all that has been discussed in Berlin.

By 15th February

- All members of working group: comments on draft, preferably by text suggestions, to be sent back to NL by 15th February

By 26th February

Amended version of the report to be distributed to members of working group by 26th February.

Working towards Ministers conference

Don't forget to 'disseminate' the report inside your own organisation. Search for means/funds so the network can function effectively.