

**BOLOGNA WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION AND DATA ON MOBILITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS
NOTES OF MEETING OF 13-14 OCTOBER, HELSINKI**

Present

Annika Pontén, Sweden, Ministry of Education, Research and Culture (Chair)
Myrna Smitt, Sweden, Ministry of Education, Research and Culture
Martin Unger, Austria, Institute of Advanced Studies
Ann Fritzell, Education International (Swedish Association of University Teachers)
Michael Hörig, ESIB
Sanja Brus, ESIB
Keith Andrews, UK, Department for Education and Skills
Melita Kovacevic, Croatia
Victor Chistokhvalov, Russian Federation
Hélène Lagier, France, International Department, Authority of Education
Zenan Sabanac, Bosnia Herzegovina
David Crosier, EUA
Cornelia Racké, University of Maastricht (observer)
Ann McVie, Secretariat (notes)

Apologies

Germain Dondelinger, Luxembourg
Pat Dowling, Ireland

1. Opening of the meeting

Annika Pontén welcomed everyone to the Swedish Embassy in Helsinki. She extended a particular welcome to Victor Chistokhvalov, a group member attending for the first time, and ESIB representative Sanja Brus who will replace Michael Hörig, as he is leaving ESIB to take up a position with EUA.

Annika initiated a quick tour the table to give everybody the opportunity to introduce themselves to the new members.

Annika presented the schedule for the meeting and circulated copies of the agenda. She pointed out that the main focus of the meeting would be the discussion at the BFUG meeting the day before but first she would update the group on the work of the data collection group.

2. Data collection

Annika provided some feedback from the data collection subgroup. She explained that Germain had reported that the subgroup would be able to produce a summary of what data were currently compiled by which organisation and provide some information about where there were gaps, i.e. where the data were not available on an international basis. The subgroup would also be able to offer some examples of the results shown by the data. The subgroup would make some recommendations about the need for greater coherence and the need for continued data collection. There remained questions about whether there was a need for some organisation to collect data on the social dimension and on mobility in a more categorical way and, if so, which organisation would be best placed to do this work. The proposal should be to give the task to one organisation. There was recognition that this might involve additional costs for the countries concerned if they needed to develop the means of providing data that they did not currently collect. The subgroup had advised that this was not an area appropriate for stocktaking as the issues were too complex.

3. Presentation at the BFUG meeting

Annika then reported that she and Germain had presented the main proposals and recommendations from the working group to BFUG. The response from BFUG had been general support for the approach proposed by the working group and for the overall objective as regards the social dimension. The overall objective, however, should be subject to some further refinement according to comments made. BFUG had agreed that it was inappropriate to carry out stocktaking in this area, but thought that it would be important for there to be some form of reporting mechanism as regards the national action that was being taken. Some had suggested there should be a mechanism for following up the strategies and action plans. Some had questioned the need for comparable data, given the diversity of the situation across countries. There was, however, recognition that comparable data would allow international comparisons, and thus influence developments at the national level. BFUG had also noted that there are several issues that have an impact on the social dimension which fall outside the responsibilities of higher education Ministers. Some had also said that the role of HEIs in promoting mobility should be emphasised.

Annika then invited comments on whether the progress report produced for BFUG could be used as the basis of the working group's report.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- There was agreement that the progress report should be used as the basis of the working group's report.
- There should be guidance on what action plans might contain, but this should not be prescriptive.
- Guidance might also be required for data collection agencies, to identify the core data that should be collected. When choosing data providers, it was important to consider whether a centralised or decentralised approach to data collection should be used. The first step should, however, be to improve data collection at the national level. In some countries, national data sets did not yet exist. An incremental approach was required. The difficulties inherent in developing reliable and comparable data sets should not be underestimated.
- It was noted that the report on obstacles to staff mobility being produced for the EI Bologna seminar on mobility might usefully inform the working group's report.
- As a general principle, BFUG had suggested that working groups should not specify how work strands should be taken forward after London.
- The report should make clear that a number of the issues addressed were beyond the scope of Ministers responsible for HE.
- The Council of Europe's General Assembly, held on 3 October, had identified the need for a more liberal visa regime for students and academics. The working group's report afforded the opportunity to include some examples of the type of difficulties students and staff face when applying for visas. Difficulties in obtaining visas had also been raised during the Berlin seminar on joint degrees.

It was agreed that:

Annika and Germain would take the lead on drafting the working group's report, consulting regularly with the full group. Specific contributions might be invited from individual group members.

The Secretariat would produce a summary of the sections of the national reports concerning the social dimension and mobility. The timescale for producing this would be dependent on the date National Reports were received.

4. Revised Communiqué Text on the Social Dimension

Annika led a discussion on the suggested communiqué text on the social dimension. A number of detailed comments were made.

It was agreed that:

Annika would revise the text in light of the comments made.

The revised text would be circulated to the working group for comments by 31 October. Thereafter, the text would be sent to the Communiqué Drafting Working Group.

5. Revised Communiqué text on Mobility.

Annika led a discussion on the draft communiqué text on mobility. A number of detailed comments were made. In addition, it was suggested that there was a need to elaborate on the definitions of mobility in the working group's report. The report might also usefully reflect on mobility between cycles as well as within cycles. The brain-drain issue should also be addressed.

It was agreed that:

Annika would revise the text, and re-circulate it for any further comments before submission to the Communiqué Drafting Group.

The timescale for reporting on national strategy and action plans would be 2009 rather than 2010.

Date of next meeting

19 December, Luxembourg (confirmed post meeting)

Ann McVie
Bologna Secretariat
15 November 2006