

**BOLOGNA WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION AND DATA ON
MOBILITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS
NOTES OF MEETING OF 11-12 SEPTEMBER, STOCKHOLM**

Present

Annika Pontén, Sweden, Ministry of Education, Research and Culture (Chair)
Maria Wilénus, 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
Keith Andrews, UK, Department for Education and Skills
Melita Kovacevic, Croatia
David Crosier, EUA
Pat Dowling, Ireland
Ann McVie, Secretariat (notes)

Apologies

Victor Chistokhvalov, Russian Federation
Hélène Lagier, France, International Department, Authority of Education
Zenan Sabanac, Bosnia Herzegovina
Germain Dondelinger, Luxembourg

1. Opening of the meeting

Annika Pontén welcomed everyone to the meeting

The agenda was adopted.

2. Reports from other meetings

Feedback from the Board

Annika Pontén reported on the discussion on the social dimension and mobility that had taken place at the Board on 1st September. She had highlighted the size of the task facing the group, and the difficulties with coverage and timing of data connection. This made it difficult to offer concrete recommendations, and the group was therefore likely to offer recommendations at a strategic level. While the group wanted to drive forward the social dimension and mobility, it would be important to offer recommendations that all BFUG member could support.

The Board had been broadly supportive of the suggested approach. Some suggested the group could offer examples of good practice. Most were in favour of asking for an action plan, but some concerns were raised about the workload involved in reporting back. The EC remained in favour of some form of indicators. ESIB had also called for specific actions, to increase the momentum behind the social dimension. It was suggested that the group might recommend that more countries should join Eurostudent. Overall, there was broad support for the way in which the group was approaching its task.

It was noted that the data sub-group was not meeting until 29th September. Annika Pontén was due to meet Germain Dondelinger on 3rd October to agree a report for BFUG. In reporting to BFUG, it would be important to explain how the group had reached its conclusions, particularly given that we would not be suggesting concrete indicators.

Stocktaking Working Group

Ann McVie advised that the next meeting of the Stocktaking Working Group would take place immediately before BFUG on 11th October. The topic for discussion would be the format of the stocktaking report. It was expected to follow broadly the format of the previous report. However, it was hoped that greater weight could be placed on the textual element of the report, rather than the traffic lights.

She confirmed that the Secretariat would collate the sections of the National Reports on the social dimension and mobility, producing a short summary. The Social Dimension Working Group would need to consider how it might use that information.

Portable Grants and Loans Working Group

Pat Dowling gave an update from last week's meeting of the portable grants and loans working group. This group too was considering what it might recommend to Ministers. No conclusions on this would be reached until the next full meeting of the group in early 2007. In the interim, a sub group would produce a draft report collating the information the working group had gathered by questionnaire. The intention was to offer a "tool kit", based on good practice. The group was not geographically representative of the EHEA and would not be proposing any prescriptive recommendations. Developing a "tool kit" would however assist individual countries that wanted to introduce portable grants and loans.

External Dimension Working Group

Annika Pontén advised that the External Dimension Working Group was in the process of elaborating a strategy for the external dimension. A broad range of topics were currently being considered. The forthcoming Nordic country seminar on the external dimension would inform the development of the draft strategy.

3. Social Dimension

Proposal for Communiqué text

Annika Pontén explained that work on drafting the London Communiqué would start shortly after the October BFUG. The group would have an opportunity to offer some suggested text, and she was therefore asking for comments on the draft text circulated before the meeting. She thanked Keith Andrews for making some suggestions for draft communiqué text.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- It was important to be both ambitious and realistic. The Communiqué drafting process tended to weaken, not strengthen, the commitments being made.
- There was a need for the Communiqué text to acknowledge that the situation on the social dimension differed from one country to another. This would help explain why countries were being asked to consider how to take forward the social dimension before a full data set was available.
- It would be important to remind Ministers of the commitments already made.
- The text could be more directive in relation to working with Eurostudent etc, but still recognising that data gaps would continue for some, particularly the newer, countries. A first step for some countries might be to set up a data collection agency.
- It was important to make the case against pan European indicators. The emphasis should be on asking countries to identify their own issues and their own strategies, action plans and data collection arrangements to address those issues. BFUG's role would be to confirm that a strategy and an action plan were in place, not to evaluate it.
- There was still merit in improving access to comparable data. This would allow bench-marking and facilitate the sharing of good practice.
- Without being prescriptive, the group might offer advice on how to develop an action plan: e.g. advising that students and other stakeholders should be involved in developing the strategy and action plan.
- The draft text should include a commitment to report on strategies and action plans.
- The text might be revised to separate out recommendations to be taken forward at country level, and those relating to work to improve data collection across the EHEA.

It was agreed that:

Annika Pontén would revise the draft text in light of the comments made. The resultant draft would not be presented to BFUG in October. Rather, the group would review it post BFUG, for submission to the Communiqué Drafting Group by early November.

Annika Pontén would prepare a short report for BFUG, outlining the rationale for the suggested approach and the main messages from the group. The report would also contain an outline of the working group's draft report.

The draft report for BFUG would be circulated to the group for comment before Annika Pontén met Germain Dondelinger on 3rd October.

Final report – draft outline

Annika Pontén asked for comments on the draft outline for the final report.

In discussion the following points were raised:

- There was a need to include a preamble to the report, including references to HE as a public good and recognising that some issues relating to the social dimension lay outwith the competence of HE ministers.
- There was a need to emphasise the incremental nature of what was being proposed. Addressing the social dimension was a long-term, evolutionary process.
- It was considered that the report should not contain any examples of good practice at this early stage. Identifying examples of good practice might be an activity for the next work programme.
- The report could contain advice on the outline and content of national strategies and action plans and how these documents might be followed up.
- There would be a need to liaise with the group drafting the report on portable grants and loans.

It was agreed that:

Annika Pontén would make the minor revisions suggested on the draft outline.

4. Mobility

Rationale for mobility

Drawing on contributions from EUA and ESIB, Annika Pontén had prepared an outline of the rationale for mobility which she circulated for comment.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The current text focused primarily on the benefit for the individual. It could be expanded to include the quality enhancement that derives from greater staff and student mobility, through benchmarking.
- There could also be greater emphasis on economic global interdependency and the relationship between mobility and employability. The benefits to society, through increased cultural awareness and integration could also be added.

- The benefits of mobility for all staff should be underlined, not just academic staff or, more specifically still, research staff.
- The section on barriers should acknowledge family commitments etc.
- The continuing difficulties with visas and work permits should be highlighted, despite a long-standing commitment to reduce such obstacles. This might require improved communications between Ministers responsible for HE and those responsible for visas and immigration.
- Mobility was often a perceived threat, through loss of good staff and students, from an HEI perspective.
- Trends V suggested that ECTS and DS were often in place but were not necessarily being as effective as they might in supporting mobility.
- It was challenging to include a mobility experience within a 2 year Masters programme.
- The importance of trusting the academic standards of an other HEI could not be underestimated. Work to increase staff exchanges and greater use and awareness of quality assurance processes would help increase mutual trust.
- It would be desirable to develop teaching collaborations, along the lines of research collaborations. Buy in to this would be required at the level of the HEI, the faculty and the individual academic.
- There was not yet any real drive for mobility between the first and 2nd cycle.
- The group might recommend increasing the number of joint programmes, as a means of creating greater trust between HEIs.
- However laudable, there would be a number of difficulties to developing a European Mobility Fund. Bi lateral agreements between countries or HEIs might be a more pragmatic approach.

It was agreed that:

Annika Pontén would use the outcome of the discussion on the rationale for mobility when drafting the BFUG document, the proposal for communiqué text and the final report.

Proposal for Communiqué text

Annika Pontén sought comments on the draft communiqué text on mobility.

In discussion the following points were made:

- The draft text offered a good explanation of the rationale for mobility.

- The reference to staff should explain that it covered all staff, not just academic staff.
- The text might refer to the need to explore methods of stimulating mobility as well as removing obstacles. Areas for possible action included improving the recognition of qualifications, transferable person rights and recognition of teaching periods abroad.

It was agreed that:

Annika Pontén would revise the draft communiqué text to reflect the comments made.

Final Report – mobility

Annika Pontén invited comments on the draft outline of the mobility section of the report.

In discussion the following points were made:

- A section should be added on “transforming political commitment into action”. It might be useful to separate recommendations relating to short or long term mobility.
- Recommendations could be addressed to HEIs, staff and others as well as Ministers.

It was agreed that:

David Crosier would check with ACA whether the report could refer to the recent ACA report on mobility.

Annika Pontén would prepare a draft report for BFUG on mobility, along the lines of that being prepared on the social dimension.

5. Any other business

Annika Pontén circulated a timeline for the group’s work.

6. Date of next meeting

2pm, 13th October and until 1pm, 14th October, Helsinki, Finland