

BFUG3 Minutes
26 October 2004

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP
NOORDWIJK, 12-13 OCTOBER 2004**

The meeting was held on Tuesday 12 October from 1300 hrs to 1900 hrs, and on Wednesday 13 October from 0900 to 1200 hrs. A list of participants is appended.

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Documents: BFUG3 1a Draft agenda 21 Sept 04
BFUG3 1b Draft annotated agenda 04 Oct 04

The Chair proposed to change the order of the original agenda points so that item 10, and then items 8 and 9, would be discussed after item 5 before reverting to the original order.

Action:

The agenda was adopted with the modifications proposed by the Chair.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BFUG AND BOARD MEETINGS

Document: BFUG2 Minutes of the BFUG meeting 09 March 04
BFUGB3 Minutes of the Board meeting 14 June 04
BFUGB4 Minutes of the Board meeting 13 Sept 04

In connection with the minutes from the Board meeting in September, the Chair informed the meeting that ETUCE has applied to become a consultative member of the Bologna Process. The Secretariat will prepare a document on the general principles for adopting new consultative members for the next Board meeting. The matter will then be discussed by the BFUG.

Action:

The minutes of the BFUG meeting on 9 March 2004 were approved.

3. ENQA PROJECT ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

Document: BFUG3 3 Status report on quality assurance

ENQA chairman Christian Thune gave a brief presentation of the status of the work. Draft documents had been presented and feedback received. The mandate calls for ENQA to work through its members and in cooperation with partners. This is a delicate process. ENQA's

extraordinary general assembly at the beginning of November will consider the drafts and feedback. With regard to peer review of agencies, the proposed cyclical review is the cornerstone. Agencies will typically be reviewed not by ENQA, but at the national or regional level. The general standards will be important, but should not reduce the freedom of European quality assurance agencies to be innovative. The proposed committee will have a consultative and advisory role. ENQA considers a European register of quality assurance agencies to be a valuable tool for institutions, students and others. Some of the substantial issues still up for discussion are identified in the document, including the subsidiarity principle and the division of labour between the national and the European level. However, a considerable degree of consensus has been achieved, allowing a substantial report to be presented in early 2005.

Peter Williams commented on the work on standards, procedures and guidelines. The mandate may be interpreted in two ways, as the term “quality assurance” can refer to either an external top-down inspection process or an essentially organic bottom-up activity carried out by the institutions themselves (which may also have external review as an element). If the institutions carry out internal quality assurance properly, the need for external review is reduced. “Agreed” standards, procedures and guidelines are difficult to achieve at the present stage because of the great differences between countries. The working group has therefore attempted to identify a threshold set of standards and guidelines that may be acceptable across the EHEA. The aim is a common understanding of standards and quality as a basis for steady, organic convergence. The group has proposed 10 standards and guidelines that go to the heart of the academic process, and is currently considering comments. In spite of different views, it should be possible to produce something that may receive wider approval. The task cannot be completed by next May, but a good start has been made.

At the invitation of the Chair, the EU Commission informed the meeting that its report on quality assurance and QA cooperation in EU member states had been adopted. The report shows that most countries have quality assurance systems, and that there is a lot of activity following the Council recommendation of 1998. Immediately following the BFUG meeting, the Commission would then adopt a proposal for a new joint recommendation, which would be very supportive of the Bologna process and build on the commitments from Berlin. Review of agencies would be one element; an agreed set of standards another. Altogether five elements would be emphasised:

1. The importance of internal quality assurance.
2. The use of an agreed or common set of standards, with reference to the work carried out in the context of the Bologna Process.
3. Creation of a European register or list of trustworthy agencies. The work on the concept of such a list has already been started (by ENQA).
4. Member states should enable higher education institutions to choose between evaluation or accreditation agencies in the register.
5. Consequently, member states should accept that assessments made by agencies on the list may be used as a basis for decisions on licensing, funding, student grants etc. even if the agency is a foreign one.

The register can only function if it is endorsed by the member states. This could be one route to mutual recognition. Involvement of stakeholders and social partners would increase the credibility of the system. Agencies should be recognised by at least one national authority and

should be reviewed regularly. The document will be the start of a debate. An annex outlines the organisation of the register.

On the basis of the introductions given, the Chair invited the BFUG to express opinions and propose guidelines for the further work to be carried out by ENQA following its general assembly on 4 November, pointing out that the process could benefit from a new impulse. Several members expressed their appreciation of the difficult work carried out by ENQA. At the same time the need for clarity was underlined. Institutions and countries should be able to look to the proposals for guidelines. The system should lead to mutual trust. Guidelines are needed for the higher education institutions, for quality assurance agencies and for the “evaluators of the evaluators”. The expertise of countries which already have detailed standards should be taken into account.

Several members pointed to the absence of government representation in the ENQA proposals and stressed the importance of the national level. Public responsibility for higher education, which rests with national authorities, includes responsibility for quality assurance. A new bureaucracy at the European level should therefore be avoided, and it was questioned whether a new committee is needed. Another question was who will select the peer groups for the external evaluation of agencies, and in what way.

Christian Thune replied that there had been a discussion as to whether all reviews of agencies should take place at the European level, but that they should be carried out at the national or regional level where this could be done credibly. The role of governments had been mentioned in an early draft, but left out because of fear of bureaucratic structures. It was now listed among the problems still to be solved. Thune stressed that the European committee is needed because without it there would be a lack of credibility. Decisions on inclusion in the register cannot be made by ENQA, which is itself a player. With regard to the selection of peers, universities cannot appoint their own experts. He expressed optimism that outstanding difficulties would be solved.

On the question of standards, Peter Williams commented that some countries adopt a very detailed approach, others the opposite, as appropriate to the purpose of the system. In reality, there are 40 different systems. The approach of the working group was to try to find out what is common among them and can thus be shared. The reasons for doing the work might need to be clarified.

The EUA pointed out that the issues where the E4 disagreed were set out in the document. In relation to the standards, there is a need for further clarification. The EUA and the other E4 partners agree on the need for a committee. Areas of disagreement regarding the committee include, for the EUA, the role of stakeholders, criteria for membership and the wish to have results for the Bergen meeting. Discussion of these issues would now have to wait until after the ENQA general assembly. Acknowledging that the report from the project will be an ENQA report, ESIB expressed the view that the procedure was nevertheless not entirely in accordance with the mandate from Berlin with regard to the roles of the other partners. Also, ENQA had so far chosen not to develop *procedures* as requested in the Berlin Communiqué, in spite of proposals from the partner organisations. In addition, clarification of terminology may be needed.

The Council of Europe pointed to the difference between internal quality assurance, which is essentially the work of higher education institutions themselves, and external quality assurance. For internal quality assurance, the legitimate interest of public authorities is to ensure that it is going on, and to encourage it. External quality assurance has an accountability function at the national level in relation to public funding. In an EHEA perspective, it is important for partners in other countries. To achieve that purpose, there has to be a minimum of agreement on criteria and other aspects. For instance, the difference between a qualitative and a quantitative approach is a substantial one. In internal quality assurance, the members of the academic community are the major stakeholders. External quality assurance systems must take greater account of public authorities and employers, possibly also other stakeholders; thus, the institutions, staff and students are not the only major stakeholders in terms of external QA. Portability of decisions is essential, but whether a European committee is needed to achieve it is not clear. There must, however, be agreement on criteria and on stakeholders.

There were mixed views in the BFUG on the question of the proposed committee. At the same time the importance of reaching agreement and bringing the process as far as possible before the Bergen conference was underlined. The reasons behind the mandate from Berlin should be clarified. Several members stressed the importance of sufficient time for advance consultation in member states before final discussion of the report in the BFUG.

The Chair concluded that in spite of different positions, there is emerging consensus. This should form a good basis for continued work. However, the participation of the E4 partners is not always described as equal. ENQA is responsible for the final report, working through its members and in *cooperation* with the other partners. This implies more than consultation. Several comments by BFUG members ask for more clarity. The work should result in clearer and more concrete outcomes in terms of the standards and guidelines as well as procedures by the Bergen deadline. All parties must work towards this goal.

Concerning the question of subsidiarity, the principle might be stressed even more clearly in the documents, because it signals an attitude with regard to the role and the competences of national governments. In the long run, it is important that the proposals from the ENQA project are acceptable to public authorities in the Bologna member states.

With regard to the review of quality assurance agencies and the directory, a responsible body or committee is proposed by ENQA and its partners. However, more work may need to be put into this proposal. In addition the committee can play a role in cases where national authorities do not take the initiative to evaluations. In establishing a directory, work going on in other regions of the world should be taken into account. ENQA and its partners are asked to take these considerations into account.

ENQA should report on progress at the next Board meeting, taking into account the considerations and views of the BFUG, and the final report should be ready no less than 2 or 3 weeks before the next BFUG meeting in order to allow for consultation in the member states.

Action:

The BFUG acknowledged the important work carried out by ENQA and its partners on a difficult task and took note of the information given.

4. WORKING GROUP ON STOCKTAKING

Documents: Minutes from WG meeting 15 June 2004
Letter from the WG Chair dated 29 June 2004
List of Stocktaking Benchmarks
Circular letter to national units in the Eurydice network, *all at*
<http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/b/hind.htm>

The Chair of the stocktaking working group, Ian McKenna, gave a brief status report, acknowledging the contributions of partners. The letter sent out on 29 June explained the process. Data collection by Eurydice is currently going on, whereas the Secretariat is assisting in gathering information from the nine Bologna member states which are not members of the Socrates network and therefore not covered by Eurydice. The deadline for this part of the process is 31 October 2004. The final deadline for national contributions to the stocktaking is 14 January 2005. With regard to the hiring of an expert to assist in writing the stocktaking report, talks were being held with a possible candidate.

The EUA informed the meeting of progress on *Trends IV*, which in presenting the state of implementation of the Bologna Process in the universities should constitute an important contribution to the stocktaking. Just as for the stocktaking, the situation might be described as “calm before the storm”. A list of 50 site visits had been confirmed and would be sent to the Secretariat. The COIMBRA network will be carrying out the same exercise in their member institutions (also more than 50).

Action:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the Chair of the stocktaking working group as well as information given by the EUA on the Trends IV exercise.

5. WORKING GROUP ON OVERARCHING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Document: BFUG3 5 Status report on qualifications framework
See also Minutes from WG meetings 16 January, 11 March, 24 May, 30 June 2004 and 10 September, *Qualifications Framework developments in Bologna and Copenhagen Processes 7 October*, and the EU Commission *Note on developing common reference levels for VET*
at <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/b/hind.htm>

The Chair of the working group, Mogens Berg, referred to the two documents presented: the status report and a document prepared by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland on the relationship between the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. The working group has finished most of its work, and a draft of its report will be made available on the Bologna-Bergen web page after 29 October. The report will be finalised at a meeting in Riga on 2 December, and then discussed at the planned seminar in Copenhagen on 13-14 January 2005. The conclusions will be ready for the BFUG meeting in March.

In the terms of reference, the working group was asked to present results and experiences from countries which have national frameworks. This may serve as advice to other countries which are just starting. The framework for the European Higher Education Area is different. It is not a framework for qualifications in Europe, but a framework for frameworks. It will not be regulatory, but provide a set of reference points to facilitate movement between countries. The proposal provides for three principal levels, corresponding to the degree cycles agreed on in the Bologna Process, with descriptors developed by the Joint Quality Initiative. The mandate also refers to short-cycle education, and in consultation with EURASHE the working group had decided to propose a single level with a single descriptor for short-cycle programmes. Credits will be part of the overarching framework; however, ECTS credits are not linked to levels, and are defined by student workload, whereas the framework will be outcomes-based. The working group will therefore recommend that the ECTS system is developed further.

Representatives of the Copenhagen process had been invited to working group meetings in order to ensure coordination between the two processes. Within the framework of the Lisbon process, there will be an initiative to connect the Bologna and Copenhagen processes in an overarching framework covering all levels of the education system. The NQAI paper compares the concepts of levels as used by the Bologna and Copenhagen working groups. The conclusion is that in spite of differences it should be possible to align the two processes.

The EUA pointed out that both it and national ECTS coordinators had been present at the working group meeting in June, but that there still seemed to be misunderstandings about the level of development of ECTS. These could hopefully be cleared up at the next working group meeting, where the EUA will also take part. EURASHE expressed its appreciation that short-cycle tertiary education would be taken into account. It is necessary to establish a “sub-bachelor” level, so that the students concerned get credits that will be recognised. In many cases this will include later recognition as part of a bachelor’s degree.

The EU Commission announced that it will call an expert meeting in November to bring the two processes together. Credits should be an element in the frameworks, as the notion of workload is still useful. There was some discussion about further development of ECTS, with some speakers arguing that the development of a credit system which takes into account outcomes and levels is important, whereas others thought that ECTS in its present form could be used in the frameworks. There was general approval of the intention to bring the two processes together. It was pointed out that the BFUG should formally mandate Mogens Berg to be its representative at such meetings.

The Chair concluded that the working group is making good progress. Important questions have to be dealt with, not least in relation to the Copenhagen process. The ultimate result should be one common qualifications framework covering the different parts of the education system. The expert meeting to be called by the EU Commission in November will also be a good place to discuss some of the issues raised with regard to credits, where a common approach should be arrived at between higher education and vocational education and training.

Action:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the Chair of the working group on qualifications frameworks. The working group Chair will represent the BFUG at the planned meeting with experts representing the Copenhagen process in November and subsequent meetings.

6. BFUG FOLLOW-UP OF SEMINARS IN THE BFUG WORK PROGRAMME

Documents: BFUG3 6 BFUG follow-up of seminars
Background papers, reports and recommendations may be found at <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/> (Previous seminars).

See also [Criteria for seminars included in the BFUG Work Programme, Reporting of Bologna Follow-up Seminars to Secretariat at http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/)

The Chair pointed out that two issues were up for discussion: how to make the best use of the outcomes of seminars in general, and the recommendations from the seminars that had been conducted so far. There was agreement that the procedure tried out in the document, with the Secretariat proposing to the Board and BFUG how each recommendation is to be handled, should be continued. It is important that recommendations are put quickly into play.

With regard to the Stockholm seminar on joint degrees, the recommendation regarding legal obstacles had been reflected in the template for the national reports. Sweden supported the proposal to prepare a document on possible follow-up. Others pointed to the link to the session on quality assurance of joint degrees in the Dutch mobility seminar. This should be followed up. The EU Commission noted that progress seemed to have been made since the seminar with regard to the possibility of offering joint degrees.

In the document, it was proposed to feed some of the recommendations from the Ghent seminar on e-learning into the work on qualifications frameworks. The chair of the frameworks working group commented that its work is based on certain terms of reference, which should not be changed at the last moment. However, the recommendations had been taken into account. Belgium (Fl) pointed out that the recommendations may be useful in relation to lifelong learning, and that this might be relevant with regard to priorities for 2007. It was noted that a lot of experience has been gained in recognising lifelong learning, e.g. in France. Nevertheless the main obstacle is recognition at the national level. At the seminar in Riga on 3-4 December, recognition of lifelong learning will be the theme of one of the working groups. The Chair concluded that the recommendations from the seminar should be taken into broader consideration in the further discussion of priorities for the next period.

The UK agreed that the results from its seminar on learning outcomes should feed into the work on qualifications frameworks. However, the learning outcomes approach also has implications for other issues under consideration by the BFUG, such as quality assurance and ECTS. The recommendations should therefore be taken into account in a broader context. The EUA commented that learning outcomes are important for the institutions, not least because of the link to ECTS, but that few countries so far have experience with developing and using them.

The Council of Europe informed the meeting that the recommendations from its recent seminar on public responsibility were now available.

The Chair concluded that at the BFUG meeting in March, recommendations from all the remaining seminars should be dealt with. A new proposal will then be incorporated for the UK seminar. The procedure where the Secretariat is asked to propose how the recommendations should be handled, is in principle a good one, but the organisers should be consulted in the process to avoid misunderstandings. In the period leading up to the BFUG meeting, the Board should consider recommendations so that they may be put quickly into play.

Decision:

For the next BFUG meeting, the Secretariat will prepare a paper on how recommendations from all the seminars from September 2004 onwards should be treated. The organisers should be consulted in order to avoid misunderstandings. The recommendations from the UK seminar on learning outcomes will be considered anew. In the intervening period, preliminary decisions on the handling of recommendations should be made by the Board, so that the recommendations may be put quickly into play.

The Secretariat will reconsider the results of the Swedish seminar on Joint Degrees – Further Development, together with the results of the discussions on quality assurance of joint degrees at the Dutch Presidency seminar in Noordwijk, on behalf of the drafting group for the Bergen Communiqué. The results from the Ghent seminar on e-learning and the UK seminar on learning outcomes should be taken into account in a broader perspective in the work on further priorities and goals in the Bologna process.

The recommendations from all Bologna Follow-up Seminars will be considered for possible inclusion in the Bergen Communiqué.

7. FURTHER ACCESSIONS TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS. PROCEDURES FOR EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS AND REPORTS FROM POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS

Document: BFUG3 7 Procedures for evaluation of applications

The Chair presented the document, inviting an open discussion. The Vice Chair stressed the importance of real assessment of applications for membership. The Bologna Process is underpinned by certain principles, and a number of objectives have been defined. As a matter of principle, applicant countries should subscribe to these. At the same time the Vice Chair pointed out that one potential applicant country was clearly in breach of the core principles of the Process, such as institutional autonomy and student participation. Belarus had recently been cautioned by the Dutch EU Presidency over the closure of the European Humanities University in Minsk, a move which had also been condemned by the Council of Europe and other organisations. There were also other breaches. Norway did therefore not intend to invite Belarus to the Bergen Ministerial Conference.

With regard to assessment of applications, the Vice Chair stressed that the procedure should be as simple as possible. Detailed voting procedures etc. may be difficult to agree on, and also complicated to implement. As issues to be decided by the BFUG are normally first discussed by the Board, the Vice Chair suggested that in this case as well the BFUG should ask the Board to assess the applicant countries according to the defined principles and objectives. This would give the BFUG a good basis for a recommendation to the Ministers.

Members stressed that even with prior assessment by the Board, the BFUG remains responsible for assessing the applicants and making a recommendation to the Ministers. There should be a possibility for appeal. Applicant countries should be informed as soon as possible of the outcome of the initial assessment by the Board and the underlying considerations, and be able to respond. However, a formal appeals procedure would not be necessary.

Decision:

Applications to join the Bologna Process will be assessed by the Board on the basis of the defined objectives and underlying principles of the Process. The applicant country shall be informed of the outcome of the assessment and be allowed to respond. On the basis of the assessment of the Board and taking into account any representations made by the applicant country, the BFUG will make a recommendation to the Ministerial Conference on admission of the country as a member of the Bologna Process.

8. INVITATIONS TO THE BERGEN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Document: BFUG3 8 Invitations to Bergen

The Vice Chair reminded the meeting that delegations from member states to the Bergen conference should be limited to five persons, including the minister. Some ministers from other regions of the world will be invited in consultation with UNESCO.

Action:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the Vice Chair.

9. PROGRAMME OUTLINE FOR THE BERGEN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Document: BFUG3 9 Programme outline for the Bergen Conference

The Vice Chair underlined that the outline presented in the document was based on the Berlin format. Feedback on the suggested themes for the parallel sessions was invited. The EUA, with support from other consultative members, emphasised that the programme for Bergen should follow the Berlin structure also where participation of the consultative members is concerned. Although the Bologna Process is a process between nation states, the implementation depends on the institutions. The EUA further underlined that it was essential to provide space for institutions in Bergen and in this way to oblige them to present a clear message of their commitment to the process, directly to Ministers.

Some members questioned whether a keynote speech was appropriate. The Vice Chair stressed that such a speech is different from speeches by the stakeholders, noting that no final decision had been made. With regard to the results of the parallel sessions, they will not feed into the communiqué, but should be actively used after the conference. In conclusion, the Vice Chair pointed to the information about the 17 May celebrations in the document and repeated the invitation to BFUG members to attend. They will receive a separate message about this from the Secretariat.

Action:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the Vice Chair. A more detailed outline programme for the Bergen Ministerial Conference will be prepared, taking into account the discussion in the BFUG meeting, in particular with regard to the role of the higher education sector.

10. A FIRST DISCUSSION ON ISSUES FOR THE BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ

Document: BFUG3 10 Issues for the Bergen Communiqué

Following a suggestion by the then incoming Chair at the Board meeting in June, the Secretariat had prepared a discussion paper, which had been further developed after being discussed in the Board meeting on 13 September. Noting that the Board has established a small working group to prepare the Bergen communiqué, the Chair pointed out that the document prepared by the Secretariat had three elements:

- progress since Berlin (and since Bologna). This should be reflected in the communiqué, cf. the stocktaking and the projects on quality assurance and qualifications frameworks. On this point the document might have referred more explicitly to the *Trends* report.
- possible intermediate goals for 2007. The Board had said that a few priority areas should be selected where concrete targets can be formulated.
- goals for 2010. To what extent can they be set?

The Chair invited an open discussion of the themes, in the same order as in the document.

Progress since Berlin and follow-up of existing priorities

It was argued that conclusions from seminars should all be included in the same document. The Chair replied that whereas before Berlin there was no option but to put the conclusions into the communiqué itself, this time there will be a report by the BFUG on progress in the period, which will summarise the results of the seminars. It is therefore possible to include only the most important recommendations in the communiqué.

The EUA emphasised the importance of the *Trends* report, which gives a view of the situation within higher education institutions. With regard to the project on quality assurance, there should be a result in Bergen; if not a final one, then at least a decision on the framework for quality assurance in Europe.

Priorities for the period from 2005 to 2007

A discussion on priorities for the period 2005-2007 followed. One of the most mentioned themes was doctoral studies as the link between higher education and research. In this area, several important meetings are coming up, including the EUA conference in Maastricht on 28-30 October. The Chair pointed out that in its meeting on 13 September, the Board had considered this a very important action line, emphasising that it should be made as concrete as possible with specific targets for the next two years similar to those set in the Berlin communiqué.

There was general approval of the idea of setting new intermediate priorities. It was argued that there should be a link between these and the work/seminar programme for the period in order to avoid too many seminars. The UK noted that the key theme of their presidency in the autumn of 2005 will be the “personalisation agenda”, which builds on existing priorities in the Bologna Process, aiming to ensure that student’s needs are accommodated.

The EU Commission pointed out that ENQA does not expect to have finished its work on quality assurance in time for the Bergen conference, and that the process must be finished. With regard to ECTS, the system should be taken as it stands, with consideration of possible improvements. For the period from 2005 to 2007, the focus should be shifted to the national, regional and institutional level. Implementation is now important, but some areas are not susceptible to targets. Concrete targets and achievements should be looked for on the road to 2010 which will later make it possible for ministers to say that the goals have been achieved.

Other speakers supported a shift in focus from programming to implementation, arguing that this justifies continued attention to quality assurance, which is a cornerstone of the process. So far the process has concentrated to a large extent on structural elements, which has been necessary. It was pointed out that there is a difference between setting targets for implementation at the national level and setting targets for further development of the action lines.

Many speakers stated their priorities for the period, with arguments as to why particular action lines should be chosen. There was agreement that new action lines should not be introduced. Several speakers argued that although work may remain to be done on the existing priorities, other action lines should also be focused on for the next period. In addition to doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area, the action lines most often mentioned were the social dimension of higher education, the role of higher education institutions and students and promoting the European dimension, including promotion of joint study programmes and joint degrees. Several speakers pointed to the link between the social dimension and mobility, which lies at the heart of the Bologna Process. In connection with higher education institutions, institutional autonomy and governance were highlighted as important themes, together with the interaction between higher education institutions and society.

The Council of Europe pointed to the fact that Ministers have twice said that higher education is a public responsibility. This is not stating the obvious, but expressing a concern. An attempt should be made to define what are the exclusive, main and important responsibilities of public authorities, where it would also be necessary to look at the instruments, such as legislation.

The Council also pointed to the interaction between higher education policies and other public policy areas. For instance, while mobility is an objective in higher education policies, limiting immigration seems to be a general political goal in many countries. Finally, with other speakers, the Council stressed the importance of promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area. It is important that the profound changes currently made in European Higher Education are correctly understood in the rest of the world.

Setting priorities for 2010

Several speakers objected to the proposed open discussion by Ministers in Bergen, arguing that such a procedure would be neither appropriate nor practical, and that it might be too early to raise some of the questions hinted at. The Chair replied that the idea of an open discussion would be reconsidered, but that the vision of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 still needed to be sharpened. There should be a first consideration in Bergen of what the EHEA should look like and how to get there. The Ministers might ask the BFUG to elaborate some firmer proposals/a more specific design for the EHEA in time for the ministerial conference in 2007.

The EU Commission pointed out that a definition of the EHEA is implicit in the existing documents. It consists partly of structural elements where it will be possible to say that things have been achieved. In other areas this will not be possible, e.g. in the areas of lifelong learning or student participation. What do the participating countries want to achieve through the Bologna Process? If the objective is external pressures on national systems which will be politically useful at home, a range of other areas may be equally important as the action lines that have been defined.

The EUA pointed out that one of the successes of the Bologna Process is the interaction between ministers and higher education institutions and students, and that such a forum or arena should continue after 2010 even if the main goals have been achieved. Other speakers as well pointed to the need to look beyond 2010. What happens if goals have not been achieved, and to the countries in question? In addition, developments since Bologna, including accelerating globalisation, may necessitate a reconsideration of the goals. Such considerations should lie at the bottom of a mandate from the Ministers to the BFUG.

Summary by the Chair

Three kinds of issues are addressed as intermediate goals for 2007:

1. Making operational the Bergen conclusions on existing priorities (qualifications frameworks, the quality assurance agenda). This includes elements that could result from the stocktaking/*Trends IV*.
2. A shortlist of important priorities for the coming period. Among the most mentioned issues, some are very concrete, such as wider application of the ECTS credit system or reduction of barriers to joint degrees. Other issues include promotion of mobility, the third cycle and the synergies between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area, life-long learning, the European dimension and the social dimension. The list is still too long, but the work of the drafting group and remaining seminars will contribute to making it shorter.

3. Implementation strategy. All agree that the process has reached an important crossroads in this respect. Efforts should be stimulated especially at the institutional level.

Many of the comments made in relation to priorities for 2007 are also relevant for 2010, for example with regard to the themes of public responsibility, institutional autonomy and the cultural dimension.

The Secretariat will draw up a short paper attempting to identify concrete targets for the possible priority areas mentioned. They should be either targets for implementation or targets for the further development of the action lines. The paper would feed into the work of the Communiqué drafting group.

With regard to the goals to be set for 2010, the idea of an open discussion by the Ministers needs to be reconsidered. Nevertheless, the vision of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 needs to be sharpened. The Bergen Communiqué should contain an element of foresight. The discussion should include longer-term goals. The aim will be a section in the Communiqué about the goals for 2010 and beyond, in the context of changing environments for the Bologna Process which make it urgent to reconsider the goals of the process. The Ministers should therefore give the BFUG a mandate to work out a more concrete description of the EHEA for the 2007 Ministerial Conference.

The Ministers will need a short paper as a basis for this part of their discussion, stating the most important discussion points. This may be prepared by the Secretariat. The paper from the Secretariat could then be discussed first in the Board and then in the BFUG before being submitted to the Ministers.

Decision:

The Secretariat is asked to develop its "issues" paper further as a basis for discussions in the Communiqué drafting group and the Board. Progress of the work will be reported to the next BFUG meeting. The Secretariat will further be asked to prepare a short discussion paper for the Bergen Ministerial Conference as a basis for a mandate from the Ministers to the BFUG to draw up more concrete goals for the European Higher Education Area for 2010.

11. DEADLINE FOR CANDIDATURES FOR THE FOLLOWING MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

The United Kingdom announced its candidacy for hosting the 2007 ministerial conference. The venue had not been decided. The Chair reminded the meeting of the deadline previously set by the Board.

Action:

The BFUG confirmed 31 December 2004 as the deadline for candidatures for hosting the next Ministerial Conference. The information from the United Kingdom was noted.

12. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MEMBERS AND CONSULTATIVE MEMBERS

The European Commission noted that the ideas listed in its action plan “from Berlin to Bergen” had been translated into pilot projects in a number of fields, including quality culture, accreditation, evaluation of joint degrees and ECTS. In addition the Commission supports working groups, including the ENQA project on quality assurance and the BFUG working group on qualifications frameworks, and horizontal activities such as conferences (including the Ministerial Conference in Bergen), the Bologna Promoters and stocktaking.

The EUA informed the meeting of the ongoing preparations for its convention in Glasgow on 31 March - 3 April 2005. BFUG members will be invited. A new board is due to be elected. The main policy document for the conference, entitled “Strong Universities for Europe”, will soon be finalised. The document centres around six main themes: academic values, the university in its environment, missions of the university, research, quality and financing as preconditions of success and institutional governance.

UNESCO-CEPES reminded the BFUG of the upcoming Warsaw seminar on new generations of policy documents and laws for higher education in the context of the Bologna Process. Another conference had recently been held on the ethical and moral dimension of education and science. UNESCO-CEPES intends to propose a project on the place of private higher education institutions in Europe, but only after Bergen. Its study on the organisation of doctoral studies and programmes in Europe and the United States has been published.

The Council of Europe repeated that the conclusions from its seminar on public responsibility for higher education and research are now available. The topic will stay as one of the Council’s action lines. The conference participants had clearly stated that higher education is a shared responsibility, where an examination of the responsibilities of public authorities must be complemented by an analysis of the public responsibility of all other stakeholders. Another important action line in the Council of Europe programme is higher education governance. A good system of governance together with appropriate financing are basic preconditions for higher education system development and consequently implementation of the EHEA.

The Council has declared 2005 the “European year on citizenship through education”. One element will be an information package for universities dealing with good practices. A recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees, with an explanatory memorandum, was adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee on 9 June, together with an ENIC/NARIC charter. The Council also works with new and prospective members, contributing to the sharing of good practice. The 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention would be celebrated starting in December.

With regard to cooperation with individual countries, the Council of Europe had organised a regional seminar for 7 Commonwealth of Independent States countries in June on student participation and higher education governance. This was found to be a useful framework for discussing difficult issues. An information seminar on the Bologna process in Moldova was being planned for the end of November. The three countries of South Caucasus had also expressed an interest in having information seminars.

EURASHE noted that its annual conference in 2005 would be held in Vilnius on 28-29 April. There would be three main tracks: applied research in partnership with industry, quality assurance and the impact of intercultural competencies on employability.

ESIB provided information about its biannual convention in December, where the main theme will be decision-making in higher education institutions. Elections are due at its Board meeting in Estonia in November, where it is also hoped that a student organisation from Moldova will be accepted as a full member. A training programme for national unions is under way, supported by SOCRATES. The ongoing student survey will provide a student perspective on the implementation of the Bologna Process, and will also feed into the stocktaking.

Action:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the EU Commission and the consultative members.

13. DATE AND PLACE FOR THE NEXT BFUG MEETING

The Chair recalled that three BFUG meetings have been planned for the spring of 2005. The first two will take place in Mondorf, Luxembourg, on 1-2 March and 12-13 of April, and the third in Bergen on 18 May, immediately preceding the Ministerial Conference. The Chair called on the Secretariat to prepare the documents for the meetings as early as possible, if possible at least two weeks in advance. If individual documents are ready earlier, they should be sent out.

The United Kingdom informed the meeting that the next BFUG meeting after the Bergen conference will take place on 12-13 October in Manchester.

Action:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the Chair and by the United Kingdom. If possible, documents for future BFUG meetings should be sent out at least two weeks in advance.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

On behalf of EAIE, Andrejs Rauhvargers requested that the organisation be given a standing invitation for one person from the leadership to attend Bologna seminars. The Chair asked the Secretariat to inform seminar organisers.

The contributions of outgoing BFUG members Andy Walls and Gerhard Schuwey were acknowledged. The BFUG thanked the Dutch hosts for a well organised conference and meeting. The Chair thanked the Secretariat for its work.