

Providing expertise on Bologna Process and EHEA outside the EHEA countries

Proposal for a decision by BFUG

Prepared by the BFUG Working Group
“International Openness - The European Higher Education Area in a Global Context”

Background

Over the last couple of years, the Bologna Process has raised growing interest all over the world and the demand for information on this reform process has increased enormously. The Bologna Secretariat as well as members of the BFUG regularly receive requests for experts who could, for instance, advise on specific Bologna-related issues or who could speak on the Bologna Process / the EHEA in general at different types of events across the world.

This is not to be confused with the existing Bologna or Higher Education Reform Experts financed in the context of EU education programmes to promote and enhance progress towards higher education reforms in *their countries*, covering all the action lines of the Bologna Process. This does not exclude that individual Bologna or Higher Education Reform Experts can also be drawn upon to provide expertise outside the EHEA.

The Report “The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in a global context”¹ submitted by the BFUG to the Ministers at their most recent meeting in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve therefore recommended to mandate the Bologna Secretariat “to provide information on the EHEA specifically targeted at non-EHEA countries, which should include (...) facilitating coordinated information visits to and from non-EHEA countries”.

Following up on this recommendation, the BFUG tasked the 2009-2012 BFUG Working Group “International Openness - The European Higher Education Area in a Global Context” with setting up “a pool of experts across the EHEA countries in order to support the Bologna Secretariat in facilitating coordinated information visits to and from non-EHEA countries” (see the terms of reference of the WG).

Having a list of those willing to speak on certain topics, with a description of their fields of expertise, prior Bologna-related experience, language skills, willingness to travel etc. could help to address the growing interest in the Bologna Process and to widen the currently rather small circle of speakers and advisers that are regularly drawn upon.

The discussion at the first meeting of the WG on 28 October 2009 showed, however, that this is not an easy task and that many questions need to be addressed.

Questions to be addressed

Who would decide which experts would or would not be taken?

What would be the selection criteria?

How to ensure a certain level of quality?

How many experts should be included and who would take care of keeping the information updated?

¹ www.bologna2009benelux.org/conference/documents/2009_EHEA_in_global_context.pdf

Would the information be publicly available or not?

Would there be remuneration for the experts?

Would the experts speak in a personal capacity, on behalf of the organisation/country that recommended them, or on behalf of the Bologna Process?

After a thorough discussion on the matter, the working group concluded that the following two options should be presented to the BFUG Board for a first feedback and ultimately to the BFUG as basis for a decision.

Option 1: database

To widen the number of experts drawn upon, to be able to find them within a reasonable time, and to increase the chances that the expert selected meets the needs of those seeking advice (in terms of expertise, experience, languages spoken etc.), a database with experts from all EHEA countries will be set up.

As it is unrealistic to expect BFUG to find and agree on well-defined selection criteria, a more flexible, decentralised approach is needed.

To still ensure a certain level of quality, only experts recommended by a BFUG member (not necessarily from the same country or organisation as the expert) will be included in the database.

The expertise listed could be related to specific action lines or to the Bologna Process / the EHEA in general and could come from policy-makers as well as practitioners.

The database will be maintained by the Bologna Secretariat with input from the BFUG. The Bologna Secretariat could, for instance, ask the BFUG once a year to check the list of experts, to communicate any changes and to make additional proposals where appropriate.

To avoid political discussions on which experts are or are not included and to avoid an over-formalisation, the database would not be public but accessible through the Bologna Secretariat only. The Bologna Secretariat (disclaiming all liability) would provide the enquirer with matching experts; the enquirer in turn would choose the expert and negotiate the specific tasks and possible remuneration directly with the expert.

Option 2: call for experts on a case-by-case basis

To avoid the problems related to setting up and maintaining a database of experts, the Bologna Secretariat could be asked to approach the BFUG or individual BFUG members by e-mail on a case-by-case basis instead.

When the experts are expected to (re)present the EHEA as such (e.g. in case of information visits to and from non-EHEA countries), the Bologna Secretariat should consult the entire BFUG with a view to ensure balanced representation of experts from different Bologna countries and consultative members. If information is requested on the implementation of Bologna principles in individual countries, the Bologna Secretariat can approach individual BFUG members to suggest appropriate experts.