

**BOLOGNA WORKING GROUP ON EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF THE
BOLOGNA PROCESS
NOTES OF MEETING OF 9 FEBRUARY 2006, NORWEGIAN MISSION,
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM**

Present

Toril Johansson (Chair)	Norway
Rolf Larsen	
Alf Rasmussen	
Barbara Weitgruber	Austria
Mogens Berg	Denmark
Hélène Lagier (for Eric Froment)	France
Birgit Galler	Germany
Friedrich Bechina	The Holy See
Joseph Mifsud	Malta
Pedro Lourtie	Portugal
Felix Haering Pérez	Spain
Bernd Wächter	Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)
Sjur Bergan	Council of Europe (CoE)
Monique Fouilhoux	Education International (EI)
Daithí Mac Síthigh	Students in Europe (ESIB)
Christian Tauch	European Commission (EC)
Nina Arnhold	European University Association (EUA)
Yvonne Clarke	Bologna Secretariat
Pavel Zgaga	Rapporteur

Apologies

Fonteini Asderaki, Greece
Annika Persson, Sweden

1. Welcome and introductions

Toril Johansson welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the working group. Ms Hanna Marit Jahr, Councillor of Education at the Norwegian Mission also greeted everyone and gave a short presentation on the Norwegian Mission's objectives in Higher Education and Research.

Professor Pavel Zgaga of Ljubljana University was warmly welcomed and introduced, as was Yvonne Clarke as the Secretariat representative on the group.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was agreed and adopted.

3. A strategy for the external dimension of the Bologna Process

Toril Johansson reminded the group of the Terms of Reference (ToR) and the task to develop a strategy document on the external dimension. It was

proposed that the three seminars arranged would provide significant input to the work, especially as the target group would extend worldwide beyond the BFUG.

- The Holy See will host a seminar focussing on the Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of European Universities and the Attractiveness of the EHEA.
- Greece in collaboration with the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) on the theme of the European Higher Education Area on the map: developing strategies for attractiveness. Including sessions on quality assurance and students and HE institutions. June 2006.
- The Nordic Countries seminar in September 2006 is to focus on areas not covered by previous seminars, eg competitiveness and capacity building. The Working Group's final report would also be discussed before presentation to the Conference of Ministers in May 2007.

Professor Zgaga explained how he thought the Working Group's final report would be prepared in three stages:

- Methodological period and time planning for preparation
- Draft report ready for Nordic Seminar in September 2006
- Final report summing up from the Nordic Seminar

The report would start with an overview of the Bologna Process to date including historic issues. The second part would be contributions following meetings and email communications from the group. The final part would be the outcome from the seminars and completed by the end of October 2006.

In discussion, the following points were made:

It appeared that the report would not be a strategy as determined in the ToR. It was proposed that a strategy paper would be developed alongside production of the report.

There were many examples of activity in the external dimension from countries and international organisations outside the Bologna Process. Though it was useful to draw on examples worldwide, it was important to concentrate on producing the strategy.

It appeared that the work area was potentially extensive and a decision to focus on the main principles of the Bergen Communiqué on the attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with the rest of the world was essential before going into the subject matter.

There was a strategic need to decide the geographical scope. Many non-EHEA countries were interested in the principles of the Bologna Process, but were not eligible to be members. However, partnerships

or special relationships could be made with country groups outside the EHEA? as well as institutions/consortia. Virtual relationships might be possible but could create a border issue.

Effective information about work on the external dimension was essential. A strategic approach was necessary to check assumptions against facts eg 'Brain drain' issue/diversity, particularly linguistic.

It was agreed that:

The final report would be prepared in two stages and inform the concurrent development of the strategy. The main principles of the Bergen Communiqué would be kept to for the EHEA.

4. Expectations and objectives

The participants spoke of their expectations and objectives for the External Dimension working group. Comments on the ToR were invited.

In discussion on the ToR the following points were made:

There was general approval of the structure. It was not a good idea to analyse the wording too much as the document had been approved by BFUG.

There were strong points especially on mutual recognition, but links to ideas may not be evident. However, the overall focus would become clear through discussion at the meeting.

ESIB (Daithí Mac Síthigh) reiterated the importance of an agreed strategy and a definition of the understanding of the external dimension. Student participation in the seminars enhanced the student role and introduced their experience of democratic staff/student cooperation beyond the EHEA.

The Holy See (Friedrich Bechina) spoke of the experience and tradition of HE institutions inside and outside the home country. There was questioning around what attracted students to European universities and whether there was the concept of a 'European University'. There was a need to set-up communication/dialogue with other countries outside the Bologna Process.

Austria (Barbara Weitgruber) took up the information/communication point in relation to the Bologna Process that had grown in Europe without a central communication strategy. The question was how to present the Bologna Process worldwide in a coherent strategy. The EC's initiatives on the European Neighbourhood and cooperation with the US, Canada and China provided examples at policy and operational level and covered the mutual interest part of the Communiqué

Education International EI (Monique Foulihoux) reported strong interest in the external dimension following Bergen and EI had followed it up with a conference session on the Bologna Process in Melbourne. EI would like clear definitions of the external dimension and attractiveness with clear links to other initiatives.

Portugal (Pedro Lourtie) agreed with points raised and thought the focus should be on what was current. The information presented should be succinct and easily understood internationally. A limited number of linked examples of attractiveness/competitiveness would be better than covering everything that is going on worldwide. An information strategy would need to identify how to relate to other regions and cultures and how different elements would influence/help the external dimension.

France (Hélène Lagier) agreed with points raised but a major issue appeared to be the Bologna Process and the EU and differences between other countries. The Process membership could be devalued by opening it up. A clear definition of the external dimension would highlight differences and areas of co-operation. It should not imply that all should be alike; to highlight what made the EHEA attractive.

Malta (Joseph Mifsud) spoke of the terms of cooperation with countries and activities in EU actions like Jean Monnet linking to the Bologna Process. It was important for there to be visible and open communication that gave a common message about the Process on competitiveness and quality in HE. However, there should be no suggestion of undermining other countries' universities and quality of HE.

Council of Europe (Sjur Bergan) looked for a clear strategy and definition of the issues. It should include an indication of how the Bologna Process was promoted to the rest of the world and the consequences of its introduction in areas of reform and in relationships with other countries. It was important to lessen any negative impact and to avoid a 'brain drain' interaction between HE and other areas of social policy.

Other issues were how to prioritise regions; measures to address priorities; who would be responsible within confines of EU policy on Bologna; potential partners outside the EHEA, if in the US there might be state governance restrictions; and how the EHEA area would interact with the wider HE world.

Denmark (Mogens Berg) would like aspects of Bologna Process identified as essential to others, whether as a reform package or as a means of regional cooperation and areas of the world identified that might mutually benefit from the Process. It was important to define attractiveness. The quality assurance and qualifications framework

gave transparency to the EHEA; there was a question whether this would be extended to the rest of the world. Recognition was identified as an issue. The report should include values and action plans and remain separate from the strategy.

Germany (Birgit Galler) thought that the importance of information to promote knowledge should be emphasised. The forthcoming German Presidency planned to follow-up work in the external dimension theme as the Austrian Presidency had with the EU/China seminar. Other aspects for consideration by the working group included competition; co-operation visibility/information as a marketing tool for the theme.

Spain (Felix Haering Pérez) supported the points raised and agreed with the ToR. There was a need to define collaboration/interaction with others outside the Bologna process. It was important to concentrate on the multilateral aspect of the work and initiatives. Preparation for the Greek and Nordic seminars would give an opportunity to discuss issues beforehand.

EUA (Nina Arnhold) had also looked at institutions outside Bologna. Universities had a long history of exchange and capacity building. EUA had long supported capacity building through transatlantic dialogue.

Toril Johanssen thanked everyone for comments. Pavel Zgaga summed up agreement on presentation of the report.

It was agreed that:

The report would present guiding/leading ideas on the external dimension.

Geography was an important issue for the strategy.

5. The Bologna Seminar in the Vatican 30 March – 1 April 2006

Friedrich Bechina presented the theme and content of the seminar *Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of European Universities and the Attractiveness of the EHEA*.

The basic ideas for the seminar included the following:

- What is Europe? – Its origins and historical development as well as geographical.
- Balance of the programme – cultural and regional experts and open to others as well as BFUG members.
- Jan Sadlak will talk about academic freedom and autonomy.
- The focus would be on outcomes – intercultural/inter-religious dialogue to promote opinions.

The group contributed some helpful and practical hints for the smooth running of the seminar.

6. Work procedure

The Working Group was asked to identify common themes, national level strategies and individual strategic elements to inform the final report.

In discussion, the following points were made:

The Danish Government reform agenda for HE had included policies to promote the attractiveness of Danish HE abroad eg scholarships.

The Government in France was involved in intergovernmental conferences and discussions on measures to abolish obstacles to mobility in HE. A study had been commissioned on how to attract foreign students as new researchers. Grants based on student excellence had been created.

In Norway, the Bologna Process had brought about change and improved quality in education and research. International comparisons of quality in HE had increased. The Government planned to promote HE outside Norway to attract quality HE students and enhance research capacity.

Economically the Holy See was not in a position to compete with larger institutions and the range of subjects on offer elsewhere. In Rome, HE institutions had gone back to the cultural and historic heritage that offered a specialised range of subjects and research material to attract students.

The European Mandate for the Council of Europe included recognition activities. The Lisbon Convention involved it in UNESCO activity in countries such as Australia and America. The EU cultural convention limited the Bologna Process range and focus. The external dimension focus could be confused regionally, for example for Russia the focus would be SE Asia. It was important to concentrate on priority areas.

Portugal concentrated on the external dimension with Portuguese speaking countries, for example, the Government had a joint declaration with Brazil that promoted student mobility and a bi-lateral agreement with East Timor for the development of HE. Portugal also fed into other projects and agreements with individual countries eg Cape Verde project to create a legal framework for HE.

EI networks ran in Europe and internationally in parallel and developed reciprocal agreements for membership. Professional development of academics linked to cultural and ethical issues. EI wanted a more integrated and international approach.

The EC's study on Student Mobility intended to provide a substantial contribution that was not based on assumptions.

Austria, as a small country, used networks in the External Dimension. The government organised programmes for groups of students from Thailand and Russia. Mutual recognition of Bachelor degrees with a US University had been brought about by Ministry connections.

In Spain, external dimension activities included the introduction of a Masters degree to Spanish universities to attract students from abroad. Erasmus Mundus students represented over half of number from abroad. Spain waited to see student numbers from China and SE Asia.

ESIB stakeholder engagement and activity in the Doctoral programme and third cycle promoted Europe as an attractive research destination. Concrete examples of the external dimension strategy in the report would make it comprehensible to internal and external stakeholders.

Pavel Zgaga posed the question why "attractiveness" and how would the point be presented. In further discussion of the report content, the following points were suggested for inclusion in the report:

- The intercultural and economic experiences of the EU area as shared with other countries.
- The difficulty that other countries might have in competing with the variety and attractiveness of HE courses in Europe.
- How the external dimension would be supported at all levels in HE, not only students included administrative and academic staff.
- A comparison of student profile examples; domestic European student, home (Bologna Student) and international students. Some students were more independent and inclined to be mobile while studying, would this extend to employment.
- The effect of the global labour market on the external dimension strategy; Universities educated students for a global labour market that increased institutional openness and increased mobility of students.
- The establishment of links between quality and attractiveness; Asian students went to Australia to study, but had moved to the EU instead.

In conclusion, Pavel Zgaga summarised the points from the discussion that he would take forward in the first draft of the report. It will cover:

- The original concept and approach to the external dimension as multi-dimensional and multi-concept.
- On academic values of HE courses and institutions it was proposed to work from data, not from preconceived opinions of quality and prestige.

- Consideration of student mobility when related to quality and variety of choice at home compared to abroad.

7. Working Group meetings

Toril Johansson asked for contributions from all stakeholders particularly from those with particular knowledge. Members would make contacts with those in 'the external dimension' and feedback questions and comments by email to Pavel Zgaga and cc to Norway.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Working Group will be on **Friday 7 April 2006** in Vienna (following the next BFUG meeting).

Other meetings proposed: Friday 5 May 2006 Brussels (optional)

Monday 12 June 2006 Vienna

August (tbc)

Toril expressed her satisfaction with outcome of the meeting, warmly thanked the participants, and looked forward to the work ahead.

Yvonne Clarke
Bologna Secretariat