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**Thematic session on the Third Cycle**

The BFUG thematic session on doctoral education was chaired by Mr. Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) who started with introduction of the agenda and the background of the topic. The ad-hoc WG established according to the Bucharest commitment prepared its report and the Structural Reforms WG acknowledging the importance of the topic proposed that its recommendations are directly discussed by the BFUG. Ms. Marzia Foroni (Italy) and Mr. Nicola Vitorio (Italy), the Co-Chairs of the ad-hoc WG, presented the main findings of the ad-hoc WG. For more information please refer to the background document of the thematic session:



**Presentation of the report of the ad-hoc WG on the Third Cycle**

It was stressed that the final report of the ad-hoc WG on the Third Cycle should be treated independently though it is an annex to the final report of the Structural Reforms WG. The ad-hoc WG met five times (December 2012 – May 2014) and additionally held a joint session with the Mobility and Internationalisation WG.

It was clarified that the ad-hoc WG members agreed to use the terms “Doctoral training” and “Doctoral candidates” in the final report. Two core principles were identified in this regard:

* Core component of Doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through original research (Berlin 2003);
* Doctoral graduates should be competent and skilled researchers, qualified for a further career in, as well as outside, academia.

The WG recommends that HEIs should continue to develop second cycle programmes based on outcomes related to research and should encourage and facilitate the transition of students who demonstrate attitudes towards research from the second to the third cycle. Institutions should increasingly include activities leading to transferable skills, interdisciplinary, valorization of research, self – entrepreneurship and leadership in their programmes, by making use of structured training and Doctoral schools. Moreover, institutions should increasingly design and implement doctoral programmes which are developed and funded in cooperation with non-academic entities, while ensuring their genuine research projects and assessment according to high standards for research.

For more information please see the presentation below:



**Presentation of the main outcomes of the Italian Presidency event on Doctoral education**

Mr. Nicola Vitorio briefed the BFUG members on two European events that took place around the topic of Doctoral Education, in connection with the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union:

* “Promoting talents, spreading excellence”, 18 - 19 November 2014, Trento;
* “International, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary: the triple “i” approach to doctoral training”, 20 - 21 November 2014, Padova.

Two main objectives of the Trento conference were underlined: i) open labour market for researchers and ii) open, transparent and merit based recruitment, career development. It was noted that supporting the implementation of Horizon 2020, removing the bottlenecks to a real mobility of researchers in the European Research Area (ERA) and better aligning national research priorities is at the core of the Italian EU Presidency agenda.

Furthermore, it was underlined that special emphasis is given to boosting political commitment to joint EU research programming, with the aim of visibly reducing fragmentation and eliminating unnecessary duplication, as well as promoting the ERA’s human resources component, and in particular the next generation of researchers.

During the Padova conference mobility and internationalisation strategies were discussed. It was highlighted that Europe remains one of the regions with the highest rate of incoming mobility. Meanwhile, 56% of European universities have their own internationalisation strategies. For more information see the PowerPoint presentation below:



The discussion that followed concentrated on the report of the Third Cycle ad-hoc WG and the future of the Third Cycle. Following comments and remarks were received:

* While discussing the employability of researchers it should be specified that in some EHEA member countries temporary contracts are the only way to hire doctoral graduates;
* The use of ECTS and Diploma Supplement is still arguable in many EHEA member countries;
* Visa issues are still hindering mobility and further efforts are required to eliminate the existing barriers;
* More efforts are needed to strengthen the links with ERA;
* The term “doctoral training” should be replaced by “doctoral education”;
* HEIs should follow-up with PhD graduates and give them incentives to continue research activities;
* The development of doctoral schools is very important;
* Public funding of Doctoral Education should be stable and predictable;
* More flexibility in the duration of Doctoral Studies is needed.

**The BFUG evaluated the report of the Third Cycle ad-hoc WG as being very inspiring to bring forward the discussion. Due to several arguable points it was decided to take note of the report as an internal working document of the BFUG and make the final version available to the public.**