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WORKING GROUP 2 ON IMPLEMENTATION

Brussels (Belgium) – 27 January 2016

Draft Minutes

List of participants

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The representatives from Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine were excused.

Introduction to the meeting

The co-chairs recalled that the EHEA is an intergovernmental process, but not entirely free of commitments and engagement for its members. At Yerevan, Ministers recognized that the state of implementation of the EHEA commitments varies widely from one country to another. This Group has to clarify its task and define on which level, from technical to political, its scope of activities should operate.

The BFUG Secretariat informed that Greece recently applied for membership of this Group, and made a short overview of the Work plan 2015-2018.

Greece will be added in the Terms of References as new member.

Terms of References

The European Commission has made some proposals for changes to the Terms of References of this Group that were presented during the BFUG Board in Chisinau (Moldova). The co-chairs proposed further changes for adoption by the BFUG meeting in March. The list of topics is still open and will be completed in line with outcomes from the Group's activities.

WG 2 Terms of References: proposals for modifications

1. In all sections *instead of “peer learning” read “peer learning, voluntary peer review”.*
2. Section “Composition of the WG – Members”:
Add “Greece”.
3. Section “Purpose and/or outcome”:

Instead of “Activities may develop policy proposals aiming at providing support to countries in achieving the implementation of agreed key commitments within the European Higher Education Area”

Read “The Working Group will develop policy proposals based among others on conclusions from events aiming at providing support to countries in achieving the implementation of agreed key commitments within the European Higher Education Area.

The working group will also make full use of the conclusions and recommendations laid down in the “Bologna Process Revisited” document as well as the outcomes of the research work carried out by Higher Education Researchers in general and of the conclusions and recommendations summarising the second Bologna Researchers’ conference in particular.”

4. Section “Reference to the Yerevan Communiqué”:

Add: “Implementing the policy measures adopted:

- The revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG);

- The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes;

- The revised ECTS Users’ Guide.”

Add: “To remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programmes and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning, as well as encouraging higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning”.

Add: “to review national qualifications frameworks, with the view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning”.

Instead of “Finally, we take note with approval of the reports by the working groups on Implementation”, read “Finally, we take note with approval of the reports by the working groups on Implementation, Structural reforms, Mobility and internationalization, and the Social dimension and lifelong learning, as well as by the Pathfinder group on automatic recognition”.

5. Section “Topics”

Add:

“- Quality assurance of joint programs;

- Graduate tracking;

- Employability;

- ECTS.”

Delete: “Mobility”.

Eventual overlapping with Advisory Group 3

As stated in the Terms of References, the present Group has to propose targeted support to member countries experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals of the EHEA and to provide policy recommendations to the 2018 Ministerial conference. Commitments to be implemented by EHEA member countries were clearly listed in the Appendix of the Yerevan Communiqué.

The representatives of EURASHE, the United Kingdom and the European Commission, suggested using as main reference points the key commitments and core values already identified by Advisory Group 3 on “Non-implementation” during its first meeting. This suggestion raised a broad discussion about the proper activities of the present Group and eventual overlapping with AG 3. The co-chairs remarked that the present Group has to discuss broader issues regarding implementation reform than AG3. Following the BFUG work plan,

WG should focus on measures adopted in the appendix to the Yerevan Communiqué and conclusions from the Implementation Report. All participants remarked that their Group was the most exposed to overlapping, due to the links with all the other Groups.

1. It was agreed (1) to use the *Implementation report 2012 – 2015* as strong evidence base on the progress of implementation in order to initially identify countries showing a low rate of implementation,¹ and (2) to ask Working Group 1 on *Monitoring* to provide updated data on 2016, if available.
2. There is a link between WG2 and AG3 on “Non implementation” but the way to handle the issue is totally different. AG3 deals with “what can be done in case of Non Implementation” and WG2 deals with “how to support countries improving implementation”.
3. It was decided to hold, during the BFUG in Amsterdam, a fringe meeting between co-chairs of WG2 and AG3 to clarify any further overlapping and discuss common actions

Objectives and methodology

Given the plurality of events, the objective of this meeting was to set a methodology of work so that targeted countries could take full benefit of the events. In this respect, the following questions were discussed:

What role will Working Group meetings play in comparison with the events organized by each country?

The Group agreed that the events represented the main support of this Group to fulfil its commitment. However, there is a need for further discussion to clarify this issue. The co-chairs reminded that the current list of events was neither exhaustive nor limitative. At any stage, members could propose new events. Conclusions from events that WG will discuss during its meetings in the framework of a thematic session will be a basis for drafting policy recommendations related to EHEA implementation.

→ **The list of events will be regularly updated and available on the EHEA web site.**

Involvement of Networks and experts in the Working group?

The co-chairs informed that the Network of Experts on Student Support in Europe (NESSIE) has sent a request to be involved in the BFUG work, especially regarding the portability of grants. The invited Belgium representative of “NESSIE” announced that he was willing to participate in the present Group and to share experiences. It was agreed that “NESSIE” would be invited as an observer of this Group, when common topics of interest would be discussed.

This Group has not to be taken for a technical one. Bilateral agreements and European programs provide this kind of technical support. The European Commission representative will communicate the list of Bologna experts.

¹ Scorecard indicators:

- Stage of implementation of the 1st and 2nd cycle
- Access to the next cycle
- Implementation of NQF
- Implementation of ECTS
- Implementation of DS
- Level of openness to cross border QA activity
- Stage of development of external QA
- Level of student participation in external QA
- Level of international participation in external QA
- Measures to support participation of disadvantaged students
- Recognition of prior learning
- Portability of grants and loans
- Financial mobility support to disadvantaged students

How to approach targeted countries?

The sovereignty of the targeted countries about education policy and intergovernmental nature of the Bologna Process will be respected. The targeted countries will be invited, possibly through the BFUG members, to take part in certain activities. The contact with these countries will be maintained at a working level and it will be suggested that targeted countries involve academics, students, practitioners and other stakeholders in the activities.

→ The “targeted approach” will respect national responsibility for education policy and intergovernmental nature of cooperation within EHEA.

How to ensure that events match the needs of the country and how to secure outcomes after the events?

The BFUG Secretariat reminded that building a dialogue with the EHEA countries about their needs was a priority according to the Terms of References: “*the main task of this Group is to contact BFUG countries (...) to clarify the needs of peer learning and not only set up a list of relevant events*”.

→ The Secretariat will draft a form to be filled in by the organizers of events as well as a reporting template including policy recommendations related to implementation.

Brainstorming sessions

The purpose of the brainstorming sessions was to select and identify relevant topics under which the Peer Learning Activities and events would be placed. “Employability” will be dealt with by both sessions as a crosscutting issue. Two sessions were set up:

Session 1: Recognition, Social dimension, Life-long Learning, Mobility

1. All of these topics were recognized as relevant.
2. . The representative of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee will communicate the Report of the Monitoring of the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which will be presented during the 7th Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in Paris (29 of February 2016).
3. “Automatic recognition” will deal with all the degrees levels according to the needs of countries
4. “Mobility” will include staff mobility, teacher mobility, portability of grants and internationalization
5. Ireland, Croatia, UK and Austria proposed to handle the topic of “inclusivity”.

Session 2: Qualifications framework, Quality Assurance, Learning outcomes, Student-centred learning

1. The WG will continue examining the *Implementation report 2012-2015* in order to identify the topics where there are main problems in implementation.
2. All the above mentioned topics were recognized as relevant, with a special focus on “Qualifications framework” and quality assurance as key areas. International dimension of Quality Assurance (QA of joint programmes) and short cycle degrees and their acceptance in EHEA countries were mentioned as specific topics which should be dealt with by the Group.

It was decided that the Group would adopt a three stages working approach to the different broad topics:

1. Organize preparatory work and preparatory discussion about selected topic in order to clarify the implementation issues. Experts should be included in the discussion.
2. Set up events and seminars in order to foster the implementation at system/institutional/programme level. The target of these events would be individual countries/organisations or group of countries/organisations.
3. Follow-up of the events: it could lead for the WG to draft policy recommendations.

For the preparatory work that needs to be done in each stage, one country/organisation or a cluster of countries/organisations has to take some responsibility in order to prepare background papers regarding thematic session.

Conclusions from events already held

Finally, the Polish co-chair presented outcomes from a previous “Graduate tracking” event held in Warsaw in September 2015. The conclusions were circulated among participants and will be useful for further peer-learning activities in this area; Belgium will organize a follow-up event.

Date, place and topic of the next meeting

The second meeting will be held in Tbilisi (Georgia) on 3rd of June 2016 and be hosted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE). It was suggested that the main topic to be discussed in this meeting will be “Short cycle”. Another suggestion was “Social dimension”.

Prior to this meeting, a seminar on “Fostering development orientated QA in Eastern Partnership countries” will take place on the second of June also in Tbilisi.