

BFUG5 Minutes
9 May 2005

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP

MONDORF, 12-13 APRIL 2005

The meeting was held in Mondorf Parc Hotel, Mondorf, Luxembourg. A list of participants is appended.

OPENING OF THE MEETING

The Chair underlined the importance of reaching agreement on the Bergen Communiqué.

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Documents: BFUG5 1a Draft agenda 17 March 05
 BFUG5 1b Draft annotated agenda 8 April 05

Decision:
The agenda was adopted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BFUG MEETING

Document: BFUG4 Minutes of the BFUG meeting 1-2 March 05.

Minor adjustments were made in accordance with comments from BFUG members.

Decision:
The minutes of the Board meeting on 11 April 2005 were adopted.

3. A EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REGISTER COMMITTEE

Document: BFUG5 3 Letter from ENQA Chair dated 23 March 05

In its previous meeting, the BFUG asked the Board to consider the composition and responsibilities of the proposed European Register Committee as a basis for discussion in the BFUG. The Board considered these questions at its meeting on 11 April on the basis of the letter from the ENQA Chair and a discussion document from the Secretariat. The Board recommended that work should continue to establish the European register for quality assurance agencies in the framework of the standards and guidelines to be adopted by Ministers in Bergen. The BFUG should ask ENQA and its partners to further develop the proposal for the Register Committee, but without government or BFUG involvement at the present stage.

The discussion in the BFUG showed that although there was general support to the principle of a register, there were a number of reservations regarding the organisation. The ENQA document left several questions unanswered. It was not clear what would be the formal structure and the legal implications. The Board did not share ENQA's view that this will have no legal implications. The other problematic issue was the involvement of the BFUG in the management of the register. It was pointed out that ENQA and its partners should be given the opportunity to further consider the questions that have been raised, however long it may take.

The ENQA Chair underlined that the cooperation and resolve of E4 group had only been strengthened in the efforts to find a solution. He pointed out three major clusters of apprehensions: ownership and composition; legal implications; time – do we need to hurry? Composition: ENQA came up with the idea, stating that for the sake of credibility it needed to be an inclusive arrangement. The issue is credibility. Legal implications may be overestimated, he said. Applicants will come with reviews stating that they comply with European standards. Mostly, these will have been made at the national level, cf. the German example. It is not the register committee that makes the reviews. He said ENQA will look into the legal implications as soon as there is some kind of go-ahead. Regarding the time issue, there had already been a lot of looking into the details. The ideas should have the chance to be tested. EUA supported all the ENQA arguments and also said it was remarkable that the E4 has reached such a consensus.

The Chair concluded that the advise to Ministers to adopt the guidelines and procedures was clear, also that they should welcome the principle of a European register for quality assurance agencies. Ministers may ask the E4 group to do further work on the questions such as they have been raised and this should be started immediately; there was no need to wait until 2007 before reporting on this issue.

Decision:

The BFUG will advise Ministers to welcome the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review and to ask that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB with a report back through the Follow-up Group. Ministers may underline the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.

4. GENERAL REPORT “FROM BERLIN TO BERGEN”

Document: BFUG5 4 Draft General Report 30.03.05 “From Berlin to Bergen”

A first draft was presented to the BFUG at its previous meeting. The new draft will be further developed as final reports from the various projects of the BFUG Work Programme 2004-2005 are available.

The Chair pointed out that the General Report was not to be a political document. The Board had decided that organisations should also send in list of events, actions and programmes to be included. The draft was to be further developed as all information would become available. To the question: Why recommendations in a report, the Chair gave a two-fold answer: Not all recommendations from seminars are included in the communiqué. They have been included in

the general report to make things complete. It should also be made clear that the Draft Communiqué is based on advice from the BFUG. A number of comments from BFUG members to the report would be taken into account in the next draft.

Decision:

The BFUG mandates the Board to finalise the report to Ministers in Bergen.

5. APPLICATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Document: None

In its previous meeting the BFUG decided to advise Ministers to welcome applications from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine unless a member country would make a reservation before the meeting on 12-13 April. As no reservations had been made, the Chair proposed that the BFUG should confirm its preliminary decision.

Decision:

The BFUG advise Ministers to welcome applications from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as participating countries in the Bologna Process.

6. NEW CONSULTATIVE MEMBERS AND BFUG PARTNERS

Documents: BFUG5 6 New Consultative Members and BFUG Partners
 BFUG5 6a Application from EI Pan-European structure
 BFUG5 6b Application from UNICE
 BFUG5 6c Application from EQUAL
 BFUG5 6d Application from EUROCADRES
 BFUG5 6e Application from ENQA

In the previous meeting, the BFUG decided on criteria for new consultative members and BFUG partners. The criteria have been sent to interested parties and also been posted at the Bologna-Bergen web site. The Secretariat have received applications / revised applications from EI Pan-European structure, UNICE, EQUAL and EUROCADRES. An application from ENQA had been received after the posted deadline.

After a short debate the Chair concluded by proposing that the BFUG should advise Ministers to grant EI and UNICE consultative membership and mandate the Board to handle the application from ENQA on the basis of a Secretariat document on the status of ENQA in relation to the set criteria. Before Bergen organisations should have made it clear that they adhered to the principles of the Bologna Process and would promote it. The Chair proposed that EUROCADRES should be granted BFUG partnership, which was what they had asked for. A code of conduct for sending documents to BFUG partners would be established.

Decision:

The BFUG will advise Ministers that EI and UNICE are granted consultative membership of the BFUG. The Board is mandated to decide on the application from ENQA and advise Ministers accordingly.

The BFUG decides to grant EUROCADRES status as a BFUG partner.

7. THE BERGEN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Invitations had been sent out in accordance with the previously agreed principles.

Regarding the conduct of the meeting, the Vice-Chair informed that it will be co-chaired by ministers Biltgen and Cimet. The opening session will be prepared speeches. All speakers will be informed of a time limit. There will be two debates for ministers. The first will be on reports: the General Report, stocktaking, stakeholders. Stocktaking will perhaps be the main point here. The second debate will be on the Communiqué, and on 2010 and beyond. He suggested keeping the possibility for a signing sermony open.

It was asked if there would be previous informal consultation among ministers of signing. The Chair pointed out that signing would not have any legal implications, but huge symbolic significance. The Process has moved on; new countries have joined; also, the Process is in a mid-term situation. Therefore a new commitment may be worthwhile looking into.

The Vice Chair asked that all participants in the BFUG inform their respective ministers about the progress of the planning.

Decition:

For information and consultation in participating countries.

8. DRAFTING THE BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ

Documents: BFUG5 8 Draft communiqué dated 070405
 BFUG5 8a 3 column

A Draft Communiqué dated 17.03.05 had been posted on the web site "Behind the Curtain". Based on comments from BFUG members and consultative members received by the deadline 1 April, the Drafting Group met on 7 April to produce a revised draft for the consideration of the BFUG on 12-13 April. The reviced draft was sent to the BFUG members on 8 April.

The draft was discussed paragraph by paragraph. At the end of the first day, the Drafting Group was asked to redraft the Communiqué based on the discussion and decisions made concerning the individual paragraphs. The revised draft was tabled the next morning and concensus was reached. The Communiqué as agreed by the BFUG was sent to all BFUG members on 15 April.

Decision:

The BFUG advise Ministers to decide on the Bergen Communiqué as agreed by the BFUG on 13 April 2005.

9. A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT FOR THE BERGEN CONFERENCE

Document: BFUG5 9 A discussion document for the Bergen Conference

The Secretariat had been asked to prepare a discussion document for Ministers in Bergen on what the Bologna process should lead to in 2010 and beyond and whether it should be

institutionalised in a more formal way. The draft tabled at the BFUG meeting 1-2 March built on discussions by the Board at previous meetings. The redrafting for the April meeting focused more on the characteristics of the Bologna Process.

The Chair pointed out that the document was intended as food for thought, not something that Ministers would be invited to agree on. The only proposed action is that the BFUG would be asked to come up with a more structured proposal in 2007. He also mentioned that the social dimension had been lost in the redrafting and would have to be reintegrated, along the text of the communiqué.

After some discussion whether or not the document should be tabled in Bergen, the Chair remarked that two issues were at hand. 1) How structured and fully prepared the Ministerial Conference should be. Ministers do not like to go to a conference with a fully prepared speech in advance, especially if will not lead to any immediate legal action on their part. Ministers then prefer a more open debate. Also, the conferences within the Bologna Process that worked best were those where there was most room for open discussion. 2). The questions that are raised are the relevant questions. Is there enough time for this discussion at the Ministerial Conference? Probably, yes. Is the document substantial enough, and would it not be better to merge it with the communiqué? That must be considered when the final version of the Communiqué is available.

As it was not yet clear if the discussion relating to the governance of the EHEA would be a separate item on the agenda of the Ministerial Conference, no decision was taken by the BFUG regarding the discussion document. The matter would be decided by the Board at its meeting on 26 April.

10. THE STOCKTAKING PROJECT

Documents: BFUG5 10 Draft stocktaking report
 BFUG5 10A Annex

The WG Chair introduced the draft report, the most important sources of data being the National Reports and the EURYDICE material. He hoped for the stocktaking report to be objective, fair and representative.

A presentation of the draft EURYDICE report followed and a draft comparative summary was handed out. Next, the preliminary conclusion from stocktaking was presented by the expert working for the project. The aim: To see how the collective group scores against the criteria, not how countries score against each other. Using a scorecard may help simplify a complex process. Validation should help address some of the concerns voiced concerning the methodology at previous meetings. The expert reported good scores overall.

The WG Chair pointed out that also other reports will be tabled at the Bergen Conference, with different emphasis. This should not detract from any of the reports; each would have its own merit. The overall positive message is that real progress has been made. However, there is a need to build up a proper support mechanism for new countries.

The Chair would not invite for a discussion of details concerning participating countries, that might be handled bilaterally with the WG. However, it was pointed out by the Slovenian delegation that national reports were mainly self-assessment – did we all interpret the questions and the scores the same way? For instance: Data should refer to the beginning of the academic year 2004/2005; reporting on changes may be based on legislation only or on practice. It was indicated by other delegations that misinterpretation of criteria might lead to false results. Clearly, the methodology was not yet fully developed.

Summing up the discussion, the Chair pointed out that the stocktaking was partly based on quantitative data, partly on descriptions provided largely by countries themselves. The degree of objectivity is determined by these limitations. What the BFUG is doing is based on mutual trust; the WG was in no position to distrust the material provided by countries. In times of corrective measures, EURYDICE, Trends IV and the ESIB material were taken into account to look for discrepancies. A number of instruments were put into place. Stocktaking is being done for political purposes to give an idea of where the process is in its mid-term stage. We want to be able to use this picture for corrective measures. Conclusion: Give the group the mandate to finalise the document.

Decision:

The BFUG delegates the approval of the Stocktaking Report to the Board meeting on 26 April.

11. DRAFTING THE BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ (SECOND DAY)

See agenda item 8 above.

12. PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION ON POSSIBLE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES 2007/9/10

The BFUG at its previous meeting decided to have a preliminary discussion regarding the future Ministerial Conferences up to 2010.

Decision:

For the time being, one should plan for Ministerial Conferences in 2007 and 2009, the intention being that 2010 will mark the realisation of the EHEA.

13. PROCEDURE FOR ELECTION OF NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Document: BFUG 5 13 Procedure for election of new Board members

The secretariat had proposed some revisions of the previously decided rules for election of Board members.

Decision:

- a) *The rules for electing Board members should be understood to mean that a country that joins the Board in the capacity of being EU troika member during the period up to the next Ministerial Conference, shall not be elected Board member in this period.*

- b) *Election of Board members shall be done in the BFUG meeting prior to each new period.*
- c) *Between Ministerial meetings in 2005 and 2007, the first period will be June 2005 - July 2006, the second period will be August 2006 – Min. Conf. 2007.*

14. DATE AND PLACE FOR THE NEXT BFUG MEETING

The next BFUG meeting will be held on 18 May (afternoon) in Bergen.