**EHEA Working Group on Structural Reforms**

**Second meeting, Warszawa, 22-23 May, 2013**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

List of participants:

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| ***Name*** | ***Country / Organisation*** |
| Sjur Bergan (Co-Chair) | Council of Europe |
| Noël Vercruysse, (Co-Chair) | Belgium/Flemish Community |
| Bartłomiej Banaszak (Co-Chair) | Poland |
| Andrejs Rauhvargers | Latvia/Co-Chair of the Implementation WG |
| Raul Ranne | Estonia/Co-Chair of the RPL Network |
| Arkadi Papoyan | Armenia |
| Regina Aichner  | Austria |
| Ana Tecilazić Goršić  | Croatia |
| Věra Šťastná | Czech Republic |
| Allan Bruun Pedersen  | Denmark |
| Carita Blomqvist  | Finland |
| Patricia Pol  | France |
| Olaf Bartz | Germany |
| Riccardo Cinquegranni | Holy See |
| Erzsébet Szlamka | Hungary |
| Bryan Maguire  | Ireland |
| Aurelija Valeikienė | Lithuania |
| Mark Frederiks | The Netherlands |
| Inês Vaz Pinto Almeida Vasques Branco  | Portugal |
| Sara Bringle | Sweden |
| Eva Grob | Switzerland |
| Carolyn Campbell | United Kingdom |
| Henning Dettleff | BUSINESSEUROPE |
| Frank Petrikowski  | European Commission |
| Anita Krémó  | European Commission |
| Karin Åmossa  | Educational International  |
| Achim Hopbach  | ENQA |
| Colin Tück  | EQAR |
| Nevena Vuksanović  | ESU |
| Michael Gaebel | EUA |
| Stefan Delplace | EURASHE |
| Gayane Harutyunyan | BFUG Secretariat |
| Ani Hakobyan | BFUG Secretariat |

Apologies were received from the Co-Chair Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) and from Belgium/Flemish Community, Belgium/French Community, Bulgaria, Greece, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Ukraine.

**Welcome and introduction to the meeting by the Co-Chairs**

Bartłomiej Banaszak (Poland) the hosting Co-Chair on behalf of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Poland and the Co-Chairing team *welcomed the participants to the Second meeting of the EHEA WG on Structural Reforms (WG on SRs) and* noted that the current meeting will focus on the transparency issues. In particular, the emphasis of the meeting will be on the existing transparency tools and the ways of enhancing transparency in the policy areas of QA and QFs.

In conclusion it was stressed that the BFUG expects all EHEA WGs written contributions aiming to facilitate peer learning and review activities and the proposal has to be developed at the September meeting of the WG.

*The second meeting agenda of the WG on SRs has been adopted unanimously.*

**Information and updates on the developments of relevance to the Structural Reforms WG**

Sjur Began (CoE), in his turn, welcomed the participants and expressed gratitude to the hosts of the meeting. Brief information on the recent developments and updates related to the WG on SRs was presented. In particular it was stressed the following:

* The revised Terms of Reference (ToR) of the WG on SRs were adopted at the Dublin BFUG meeting. In addition the specific tasks of the ToR were complemented by a new element following the recommendation of the Irish Presidency Conference on QA in QF.
* The recommendation by the BFUG Board on including the network of RPL in the mandate WG on SRs and the request to update its ToR according to the Bucharest Communiqué and the 2012-2015 Work Programme.
* Establishment of a small Ad-hoc group on joint programmes and joint degrees reporting to the WGs on Structural Reforms and Mobility and Internationalization. The members of the group are Andrejs Rauhvargers (Latvia), Achim Hopbach (ENQA), Colin Tück (EQAR) and Mark Frederiks (the Netherlands).
* Maintaining close contacts between 4 main WGs as well as between the WG on SRs with its respective sub-structures

Afterwards the WG members briefed on recent EHEA conferences related to the activities of the WG on SRs.

* ***Feedback on the Conference on Rankings and the Visibility of Quality Outcomes in the European Higher Education Area, Dublin, 30-31 January 2013***, ***Bryan Maguire (Ireland):*** The conference was an official launch of a two-year “implementation phase” of U-Multirank as an on-line instrument which enables to design personalised rankings for comparing performance of universities and colleges in the areas of teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement. Support from the HEIs and national authorities will be required for ensuring smooth implementation of the instrument. Although the conference didn’t develop specific conclusions or recommendations, interesting discussions were held on the quality of the outcomes measured against inputs that might turn out to be quite challenging methodologically.
* ***Feedback on the Conference on Quality Assurance in Qualification Framework, Bryan Maguire (Ireland):*** The concept of this conference was to bring together representatives from the higher education and VET sectors alongside the colleagues involved in QF and QA to discuss broad range of issues concerning the relationship and interaction between two vital instruments within EHEA, i.e. QA and QFs. For more details please see the documents below.
* ***Feedback on the seminar on the second cycle, Zagreb, Ana Tecilazić Goršić:*** The Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and the University of Zagreb within the framework of Irish and Croatian co-chairmanship of the BFUG organized the International Seminar on the 2nd Bologna Cycle. The purpose of the Seminar was to examine the feasibility of *having common principles for Master programmes in the EHEA***.** For more information, please see the document below.

***Feedback on AHELO ranking, Nevena Vuksanović*:** Methodology developed by the project doesn’t consider the details of the reforms and varieties of the existing national HE systems. In addition joint concerns were raised regarding the feasibility of development of testing instruments for humanities or social sciences, concentration on ranking of institutions having financial means to pay which excluded rather big quantity of HEIs, too much concentration on the private sector and labour market.

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***Information on pathfinder group on automatic recognition, Frank Petrikowski and Allan Bruun Pedersen***

The Pathfinder Group already identified existing system level automatic recognition regimes at both national and regional level. The Group now tries to identify transferable practices that could be taken up by other countries. A Western Balkan regional intiative is being developed, led by Slovenia; Benelux countries have initiated discussion on setting up a functional system of recognition in their countries; Germany is exploring cooperation with its German-speaking neighbours; and Nordic and Baltic countries have examined ways of cooperating on recognition based on the mutual recognition agreement between Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

In addition the following activities and tasks are scheduled within the remits of this group:

* Mapping of existing recognition procedures in countries as well as in HEIs;
* Survey on identifying the barriers to recognition, analysing probable regional cooperation as well as finding out smoother recognition procedures while examining required documentation of the different offices when making recognition decisions;
* Survey on discovering the issues the students face while recognition of their qualifications carried out with the assistance of national student organisations.
* Trying to identify the existence of any general degree recognition standards within the members of the pathfinder group.

*During the deliberations the following comments were made:*

* Institutions are not exempt from the commitments made by the public authorities. and are bound by the rules and provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).
* Institutional recognition policies based on the LRC principles and be part of internal and external QA.
* Integration of recognition into QA should be considered, particularly the importance of coherence between QA and recognition practices should be stressed.
* Explicit reference in revised ESG should be proposed based on the existing good practices.

**Information on ESG revision Steering Group, Achim Hopbach**

Achim Hopbach stressed that the starting point for the revision process is derived from the findings of MAP-ESG project and the open consultation that took place in spring 2013. Next steering group meeting will take place in June to discuss the complete map of standards and guidelines. Moreover, the cooperation between the WG on SRs and the ESG steering group was highlighted.

The first draft of the revised document will be presented at the thematic session planned for the November BFUG meeting.

**Update on the Network of National Correspondents on Qualifications Frameworks, Sjur Bergan**

Sjur Bergan (CoE) introduced the meeting schedule of the network and stressed the positive experience of the network in relation to cooperation with the National Contact Points of the EQF. Most countries now are either at relatively advanced stage of preparing their own national frameworks or are in the process of self-certification. Nevertheless, there is a general concern in regard to participation in the network, since only half of the countries were present at the last network meeting. The importance of presence of the countries which have already developed their NQFs was indicated, some members of the network acknowledged that they have really benefitted from exchange of experience. Therefore, the members of the WG on SRs were asked to raise the issues of representation with their countries.

**Update on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)Network, Raul Ranne**

Raul Ranne, the Chair of the RPL network was invited to present the ongoing work within the network and its updated ToR. Currently, the network has 45 members representing 24 countries, UNESCO, EUA, EURASHE and other stakeholders.

It was highlighted that the next meeting of the network will take place in Krakow, 26-27 September, 2013 which will amongst other issues will discuss the rationale for updating the ToR, i.e. to correspond to the new challenges in RPL to be tackled under the 2012-2015 BFUG Work Plan. The network will participate in the Nordic-Baltic peer learning event on RPL that will be organised in Tallinn, 16-17 December with case studies from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia.

As a conclusion was highlighted cooperation of the network with Cedefop/EC, which is currently working on improving the guidelines on validation of informal and non-formal learning.

**Cooperation with the Implementation Working Group, Andrejs Rauhvargers**

Andrejs Rauhvargers(Latvia), the Co-Chair of the WG on Implementation was invited to present the recent developments of the WG on Implementation as well as to discuss the ways of enhancing the cooperation and avoiding the possible overlaps between these two working groups.

It was noted that the second meeting of the WG will be in Luxembourg, July 2, during which the set of indicators will be discussed. Besides the existing indicators news ones will be introduced where needed. The approbation for indicators will start in autumn, so in case if the WG on SRs would like to propose new indicators that should be done till September.

The data collection will be carried out during the period of November 2013-April 2014 and the draft Implementation report will be available for discussion with the countries at the end of 2014. It was stressed that it will be important to keep the deadlines and that the late applications submitted by the countries will be not integrated in the Report.

In conclusion the following issues were raised in in relation to cooperation of the two WGs:

* What is Bologna degree system?
* How far the borders of Bologna can be extended?
* What is the role and the place of short cycle qualifications within the QF-EHEA?

The following concerns were raised by the participants in the discussion:

* Need to explore the extent to which the Bologna structures are implemented and the way they are interpreted, whether they serve the purpose. The data provided by the Implementation WG will assist in the process of exposing the areas that need enhancement and further efforts.
* Need to tackle the issue regarding the role and place of short cycle qualifications in QF-EHEA;
* Need to remind the stakeholders about existing descriptions and recommendations particularly while dealing with the variations of required workload, credits, learning outcomes obtained in second cycle programmes.

**Focus on Transparency**

Noël Vercruysse (Belgium/Flemish Community), the Co-Chair of the WG on Structural Reforms in general introduced the concept of transparency and its instruments, major transparency issues for the main policy areas of the structural reforms and the connection of transparency with transversal issues, i.e employability, etc. He also noted that in the first decade of the Bologna process the constancy, compatibility, comparability and readability of the national systems was needed to enhance transparency of the diversity within EHEA.

For more details see the ppt below.

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*In the discussion the following issues and concerns were raised:*

To avoid the usage of rankings in making public policy recommendations.

To enable public to be informed on the agencies registered in EQAR with the help of the website.

To work on the concept of diversification, particularly on ways of promoting readable diversification.

To consider the scope of the work related to transparency tools and the way it can be translated into guidance activities for stakeholders.

To enable provision of high quality information on transparency as a precondition for guidance.

To make diversity of higher education systems understandable for people relying on the proper use of transparency tools by national authorities and stakeholders.

To promote better interaction of information providers and stakeholders inquiring appropriate guidance on the existing data and diverse sources.

To find out the extent to which it is feasible to consider the comparison among transparency functions.

On one hand to take care of diversity as an asset of the EHEA and on the other hand to explore the extent to which it is reasonable to provide standardised and evidence based criteria for quality.

To escape introducing QA as a purely accountability tool as it reduces the scope of QA activities.

To give preference to subject based rankings rather than to institutional rankings aiming to maintain existing diversity of EHEA.

To provide more relevant and trustful information by HEIs.

To explore the possibilities for getting reliable data to measure the employment rate after graduation.

To strive for more coherent and proper implementation of Diploma Supplement.

To better articulate the necessity of transparency as a precondition for further development of EHEA as well as to examine the main targets of transparency and the benefits stakeholders obtain from the various transparency tools.

***Breakout sessions: Analysing the interlinkages between transparency and qualifications frameworks as well as transparency and quality assurance:***

For further coherent identification of salient issues referring to interlinkages between transparency and QFs as well as transparency and QA the WG was split into two sub-groups. Each group had a chair, facilitator and rapporteur (See annex attached).

***Session on Transparency and Quality Assurance***

Taking into account general developments in the areas of transparency and QA, the following key issues were tackled:

* Purpose of transparency: transparency as a purpose of QA like accountability and enhancement vs transparency as a principle of QA;
* The discussions on transparency aspect of QA should not be detached from the various purposes of QA procedures;
* Role of QA agencies in information provision vs EQAR as a transparency tool;
* Provision of independent information on quality of HEI programmes for the purpose of comparing HEIs programmes as well as for decision-making (funding, enrolment, collaborative work);
* Types of reports to be provided by HEIs on their performance: summative vs formative conclusions, descriptive vs analytical, quantitative vs qualitative, comparable vs individual, etc.
* Readability and comprehensibility of reports.
* QA and the quality of data used to improve institutional self-knowledge including data on employability from graduate tracking.

Detailed information is given in the documents below:

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***Session on Transparency and Qualifications Frameworks***

Taking into account general developments in the areas of transparency and qualifications frameworks, the following key issues were tackled:

* Transparency as an objective, which has been partially been achieved;
* Role of referencing and self-certification processes and reports in contributing to transparency;
* Ways of preparing comprehensible and relevant information targeted to different audience, providing concrete examples by competent authorities (e.g. EQF NCPs);
* Ways of making referencing and self-certification reports easier to read, more comparable and standardised;
* Ways of better demonstrating the need of the involvement of international experts;
* Role of referencing and self-certification reports as a useful tool to building trust in qualifications;
* Need of referencing and self-certification reports being regularly updated (e.g. every 2 year) for the purpose of remaining relevant;
* Role of QFs as transparency instruments, the wider usage of QFs for enhancing the recognition;
* Role of Diploma Supplement and ECTS as important transparency tools;
* Importance of EQF portal as an important transparency tool, useful for parallel comparison of qualifications.

Detailed information is given in the documents below



After the presentation of the break-out sessions outcomes the following suggestions and concerns were raised to be considered:

* Distinguishing between the real transparency functions while referring to QA and QFs: need to be quite precise when talking to experts on one hand and being more general when providing information to non professionals on the other hand;
* Exploring the ways of fitting the purposes of various stakeholders with comparison tools to be created;
* Exploring the possibility of having a common template to reflect the diversity of existing study programmes and to enable their comparison;
* Differentiation between the profiles of reports provided by institutions: extensive QA reports for the agencies and short ones for perspective students and employers;
* Providing transparent information by universities for staying relevant;
* Consideration of easy understandable and reliable information when talking about the transparency;
* Exploring the ways of conveying end users that the provided information is truthful and reliable and complete;
* Exploring feasibility of elaborating a common European approach on setting criteria, standard formats or package of information provided by the institutions on each program;
* Better examination by external QA agencies on the objectiveness and reliability of information provided by HEIs vs marketing aspect;
* Taking into account the requests from the various stakeholders when providing information;
* Identifying salient issues to be tackled in the system of QA processes. Distinguishing between the issues to be delegated to external QA and internal QA bodies;
* Exploring the ways to overcome the issue connected with incomplete information provision by HEIs, in particularly when referring the aspects of being to quality assured and recognised;
* Developing markers for the students guiding them during choosing a programme;
* Making the diversity understandable, making the sense of diversity;
* Distinguishing between the information provision and guidance as well as exploring the possibility to build formal links with Euroguidance network;
* Further promoting the learning outcomes as an important information source for the stakeholders;
* Information on satisfaction, employability and costs of the study programmes vs value of information on the LOs;
* Considering learning outcomes as one of the concepts that link together the main policy areas of the structural reforms;
* Better articulating the meaningful role of learning outcomes as a common language and tool capable enhancing the transparency vs the extent to which it should be considered as a transparency tool;
* Exploring the ways enabling HEIs better use the learning outcomes;
* Considering institutional level as a major place for the changes which requires hard shift of the academia thinking;
* Looking beyond the documents as sometimes they don’t correspond to the reality, particularly when talking of intended and achieved LOs;
* Developing training courses that describe the ways of reaching LOs;
* Concept of trust vs the need for verification;
* Exploring ways of linking QA to the implementation of the learning outcomes;
* Exploring the possibility of assessing academic values as well as QA by peers;
* On hand emphasising employment rate and on the other hand the importance of this indicator for the stakeholders;
* Striking to balance the number of transparency tools;
* Exploring the extent to which QA should encompass the employability: employers are the best to assess skills and competencies gained in education useful for the labour market;

**Feedback for the Work Program of the Activities on the Peer Learning and Review Initiative**

The Bucharest Communiqué has foreseen the proposal for EHEA Peer Learning and Review Initiative, which aims to progress the implementation of the Bologna tools and priorities. During the Dublin BFUG meeting it was concluded that the WGs would be instrumental in identifying specific areas for peer learning and peer review. It is planned to discuss the topic during the September meeting of the WG. The following comments were made:

* To further analyse the gaps related to the implementation of the Bologna process (e.g. countries without QA agencies)
* To explore the ways of attaining defined learning outcomes and possibility for implementation guidelines;
* To overcome the gap between the design and implementation of self-certification reports;
* To better articulate the role of EAR manual for HEIs recognition practices.
* To organise peer learning activities on implementation of LOs with reasonable composition of countries.
* To exchange examples of certaing aspects of RPL, especially QA in RPL.
* To use holistic approach while finding the best examples of implementation of structural reforms and to identify best practices related to the Bologna triangle. Transversal issues should be tackled as well.
* The new EU Erasmus for All programme will provide opportunity for the countries to organise PL activities.

**Further work plan for the Working Group.**

The following aspects were stressed in relation to the further work plan of the WG.

* The draft report should be ready by the end of summer 2014.
* Relationship with the sub-structures under the mandate of the WG should be enhanced.

Furthermore, it was noted that the next meeting of the WG (September 24–25) will be focused on QFs. The WG will hold a joint session with the EQF Advisory Group organised in the afternoon of the second day. For the planning purposes it was also mentioned that the following meeting of the WG will take place either on December 2013 or January 2014 depending on the review of ESG and the work carried on joint programmes and degrees.

Common principles of QA of HE and VET sectors and indicators, which can be addressed to the WG on Implementation for data collection have to be considered. The next item on the agenda is QA and ESG and, probably, joint degrees, to be discussed at the WG meeting after the Vilnius BFUG thematic session on ESG .

The first draft of the report of the WG on SRs will be presented to the BFUG at its fall 2014 meeting.

**Any other business**

For coordination purposes a meeting of the WG on SR Co-Chairs and Chairs of its sub-structures will be held in Rome, July 8.