

towards the european higher education area

bologna process

BFUG6 Minutes
6 June 2005

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP BERGEN, 18 MAY 2005

The meeting was held at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (Norges Handelshøyskole) from 13.30 to 16.30. A list of participants is appended.

OPENING OF THE MEETING

Rector Per Ivar Gjørsum gave a brief presentation of the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration. On behalf of the BFUG, the Chair thanked the rector for his hospitality in hosting the meeting.

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Documents: BFUG6 1a Draft agenda 9 May 05
 BFUG6 1b Draft annotated agenda 9 May 05

The Chair announced the procedure for election of new Board members (agenda item No. 7). The EU troika in the autumn of 2005 will consist of Luxembourg, the UK and Austria. Then Luxembourg will be replaced by Finland, and after that the UK by Germany unless the EU system of governance changes in the meantime. Malta, Latvia and Slovenia were outgoing members of the Board. The Chair reminded the meeting that the Board is a preparatory group for the BFUG and does not normally make decisions. He further pointed to the need to have regional balance as well as a balance between EU and non-EU countries.

Countries were invited to propose candidates by the end of the tea break. The election would then be decided by written ballot.

Decision:

The agenda was adopted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BFUG AND BOARD MEETINGS

Document: BFUG5 Minutes of the BFUG meeting 12-13 April 05
 BFUG5 List of participants 12-13 April 05
 BFUGB8 Minutes of the BFUG Board meeting 26 April 05

Decision:

The minutes of the BFUG meeting on 12-13 April 05 were approved.

3. THE BERGEN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

The Vice Chair noted that participation at the conference would be very good. There would be delegations from all participating and applicant countries and also from all the consultative members. Most delegations would be headed by ministers, and there would be a high press turnout. Altogether some 300 participants and more than 50 journalists had been registered. The proposed signing ceremony was intended to give the 16 participating countries which were not present in Bologna the opportunity to express their commitment to the Process in a symbolic way. Signing would not be legally binding to any greater extent than adopting the communiqué without signing. The final decision on signing would be taken by the ministers themselves. Special arrangements would be made for ministers who had to leave early. The press conference at the end would involve the host country, the EU Presidency, the previous and next host country and some of the consultative members.

A speakers' list would be made available at the beginning of each ministerial debate; i.e. the general debate and then the debate on the communiqué. The theme of the Bologna Process after 2010 might be discussed at the end of the debate on the communiqué. The ministers are *informed* of the various reports presented to the conference, but *adopt* the communiqué; that is where the decisions are made. Each minister would be requested to bring only one adviser to the debate.

The Chair noted that there had been contacts with a number of ministers, who had expressed a preference for a strategic discussion rather than an item-by-item discussion of details, whether of the communiqué or the reports.

Decision:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the Vice Chair.

4. THE BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ

Document: Communiqué as agreed upon by the BFUG, 13 April 2005

The Chair noted that the reports presented to the Ministerial Conference are a “feeding ground” for the communiqué. The communiqué itself is a political declaration, a declaration of intent, not a legally binding document. There would be a general discussion first, then a discussion on paragraphs or groups of paragraphs. Stylistic changes were not looked for.

Some proposed amendments had been received by the Secretariat since the last BFUG meeting, and further proposals were made in the meeting. All are listed below. The Chair stated that there would be no redrafting before the meeting of the ministers, and therefore no discussion at this stage. Nevertheless, elements could be put forward to say: “this is what we would like the ministers to discuss”. The Chair expressed himself in favour of an open discussion among the ministers. The communiqué could then be amended as necessary in the evening of the first day of the conference, after the ministers' discussion. Several countries asked for written copies of the proposed amendments, arguing that this would lead to increased transparency. The Chair replied that prepared statements tend to be read out, and that he would like to see a genuine discussion free from the formal constraints of legality, written statements etc. Also, the strict time constraints should be taken into account.

The following proposals were reviewed in the meeting and afterwards presented to the ministers:

Paragraph 7

Dutch delegation: *In the brackets, change “linked to the first cycle” to “within the first cycle”.*
Add “Ministers invite the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how a profile distinction for more professionally oriented Bachelors and more academically oriented Bachelors can be incorporated in, or added to the overarching framework of qualifications in the EHEA”.
Delegation of the French speaking community of Belgium: *Delete “(including the possibility of shorter higher education linked to the first cycle)”.*

Paragraph 8

Russian delegation: *Change “as now being developed within the European Union” to “using good practice of separate countries and groups of countries”.*

Paragraph 10

Delegation of the Flemish speaking community of Belgium: *Add to second sentence “while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria”.*

Paragraph 12

Greek delegation: *Substitute first sentence by “We ask the Follow-up Group to define prior learning and elaborate an agreed set of standards and criteria on prior learning including non-formal and informal learning and report back to Ministers in 2007.”*

Paragraph 14

Austrian delegation: *Add “We call upon EUA through its members to prepare a report under the responsibility of the BFUG on further development of the basic principles for doctoral programmes to be presented to Ministers in 2007.”*

Paragraph 15

Delegation of the Flemish speaking community of Belgium: *Substitute second sentence by “We therefore renew our commitment to making quality higher education equally accessible to all by taking structural measures on national level to widen access to disadvantaged and other underrepresented social groups and to enhance participation to higher education throughout life, and stress the need for appropriate conditions for students, so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background.”*
French delegation: *Add: “The social dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services.”*

Paragraph 19

Delegation of the Flemish speaking community of Belgium: *Add after bullet points “The Follow-up Group will furthermore report on the progress in widening access to higher education of groups defined by the respective countries as being “underrepresented”.*
French delegation: *Add: “We also charge the Follow-up Group with presenting comparable data on the mobility of staff and students as well as on the social and economic situation. The future stocktaking will have to take into account the social dimension as defined above.”*

The proposed amendments were then briefly presented, and some questions were asked. Austria stated that the purpose of its proposal was to emphasise the importance of linking the EHEA and the ERA and to make sure that research takes place at the university level. It is necessary to work on developing doctoral programmes. The European Commission supported the intention of the proposal, but questioned whether it would be appropriate to invite the EUA to do something under the responsibility of the BFUG. ESIB also questioned this. The Chair replied that any working group that is being established operates under the auspices of the BFUG, and that the BFUG decides the membership of the groups.

Belgium (Fl) pointed out that the social dimension is an overarching principle in the Bologna Process, but that this was not very clearly reflected in the draft communiqué. This was the reason behind its proposed additions to paragraphs 15 and 19. Paragraph 9 might appear unclear to people who had not read the ENQA report. It should therefore be made clearer that national reviews will also respect accepted standards and guidelines. The use of the term “underrepresented groups” was questioned. Belgium (Fl) replied that this might be changed, and that the appropriate target group must be defined at the national level (gender, ethnic, social disadvantages, physical disability, age).

Russia pointed out that the European Union was not the only place where frameworks for qualifications were developed and asked that the reference to broader frameworks for LLL should not be restricted to the European Union.

With regard to the short cycle within the first cycle, where different amendments were proposed by Belgium (Fr) and the Netherlands, the Chair reminded the meeting of the mandate given in the Berlin Communiqué. In addition, EURASHE had been invited into the BFUG as a consultative member. A vast number of students are enrolled in shorter higher education, and the ministers are also responsible for those. EURASHE also pointed to the Berlin Communiqué, as well as to the report from the working group on qualifications frameworks. Belgium (Fr) replied that it was not against the short cycle as such, but against the way it was referred to in the draft communiqué. This was supported by Germany. Greece also supported the proposal to delete the phrase in brackets in paragraph 7. Other countries supported the wording of the draft communiqué. The Chair reminded the group that the purpose was not to discuss the issues in the BFUG, but to prepare the discussion of the ministers.

The Netherlands noted that the cycles are defined by learning outcomes and that the learning outcomes of the short cycle are within the level of the first cycle, irrespective of the way in which the education is provided. Their amendment was proposed in order to prevent the interpretation of “linked to” as “progression to” the first cycle. Furthermore it motivated their other amendment to share descriptors that will probably be made on profiles when more national frameworks are being developed.

In summing up, the Chair pointed out that a draft communiqué had been agreed by the BFUG in Mondorf. There would be no redrafting at present; the intention was to be aware of possible amendments. He further pointed to the necessity of consistency with preceding communiqués. The communiqué is a political declaration. It must reflect diversity – the fact that there is provision of one type in one country and another type in another is not contrary to achieving the goals. The communiqué would take stock of progress and at the same time look forward.

The Secretariat noted that a reference to the ESIB student survey would be included in the communiqué, but that it had not been possible to do so before as it was not ready.

Action:

The members of the BFUG will brief their Ministers on points where a discussion may be expected.

5. OTHER BFUG DOCUMENTS FOR THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Documents: General Report “From Berlin to Bergen”
 Bologna Process Stocktaking Report
 BFUGB8 5 final The EHEA beyond 2010

The Secretariat stated that the reports had been finalised in line with the decisions of the Board meeting on 26 April. In the stocktaking report, adjustments had been made to underline that the aim is to show overall progress in the Bologna Process rather than make comparisons between countries. The discussion document on 2010 and beyond had been sent to the members of the BFUG as background material for briefing of the ministers. The Chair commented that all the reports together, including the *Focus* study of EURYDICE, give a good picture of the progress of the Bologna Process.

Action:

The BFUG took note of the information given by the Secretariat.

6. FROM BERGEN TO LONDON

The Chair noted that the Board meeting on 15 June is intended to bridge the gap between the Bergen conference and the BFUG meeting in October. It will be essential to adopt a work programme at the October meeting, including decisions on seminars and working groups. The Board may give input to the planning process in its meeting on 15 June.

The UK briefly presented the plans for its EU Presidency meetings in Manchester in October, including the BFUG meeting on 12-13 October. In connection with the BFUG meeting, the need to elaborate a work programme for the next period was emphasised. There may be two kinds of seminars: those that form part of the work programme, and national or regional seminars with relevant themes, but organised with a focus on the needs and concerns of the country or region in question.

Action:

The BFUG took note of the preliminary statements regarding the development of the next work programme.

7. ELECTION OF NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Document: BFUG6 7 Election of new Board members

In accordance with the procedure announced by the Chair at the beginning of the meeting, cf. agenda item 1, four candidates had presented themselves by the deadline: Denmark, Greece, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey. A written ballot was conducted.

Decision:

Denmark, Greece and Turkey are elected as members of the Board of the Bologna Follow-up Group for the period June 2005-July 2006.

8. DATE AND PLACE FOR THE NEXT BFUG MEETING

Document: BFUGB7 Invitation from the UK

Decision:

The next BFUG meeting will be held on 12-13 October in Manchester.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business.