

COUNCIL OF EUROPE BOLOGNA PROCESS INFORMATION SEMINAR

26 JANUARY 2006

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

The Bologna Board members, ENQA, the Chairs of the Working Groups and representatives from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and the Ukraine were invited to attend.

1. Welcome by the Chair

The Chair welcomed the meeting attendees on behalf of the Presidency and the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Culture. Representatives from Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Ukraine were in attendance. Poor weather conditions had prevented the Armenian representative from attending and the Moldavian representative sent apologies and best wishes. The Chair thanked Sjur Bergan of the Council of Europe (CoE) for his assistance in coordinating the event.

2. Short introduction to the Bologna Process

The Chair gave an overview of the Bologna Process, highlighting the fact that it was a political agreement and not legally binding. It was an important impetus in HE reform. The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) had been set up to manage the process. It had its own website where documents on the Process and links to related organisations were available for information. Stakeholder involvement was key to the success of the Process. Each of the stakeholder bodies involved in BFUG would give a short presentation about their role.

3. European University Association (EUA) – David Crosier

- David Crosier presented EUA's priorities, aims and role in the Bologna Process. EUA offered support to members in implementing reforms through conferences and workshops, and projects focusing on sharing good practice. EUA did not currently include many member institutions in the newer country members of the Bologna process. Increasing membership was a challenge for EUA.
- To help assess the stage of implementation of Bologna reforms, EUA undertook a regular survey (Trends). The Trends V report would be presented in 2007 at the EUA Convention and the London Bologna Conference. The new countries' representatives were encouraged to assist in identifying institutions to host site visits for the Trends research team.
- Working with EURASHE, ESIB and EAIE, EUA was leading a new project for Bologna Promoters across the EHEA. This would be an additional source of support for institutions implementing Bologna

reforms

4. European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) – Roland Vermeesch

- Roland Vermeesch outlined the structure and priorities of EURASHE in promoting the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Its mission was detailed in the Vilnius Statement on Lifelong learning produced prior to the Bergen conference. EURASHE had supported the Bologna Process from the outset, took part in BFUG and was represented on the BFUG Board.
- EURASHE's priorities included promoting quality assurance in HE; graduate employability and engagement in lifelong learning; development of Bachelor-Master structure in HE institutions; facilitation of student and teacher mobility; increased sector funding and student participation; improvement in the area of applied research; networking and partnerships/consortia between institutions; the integration of Tertiary Short Cycle Education (TSC) in a qualifications framework for European HE. It was hoped that the newer countries would take part in EURASHE events taking place in 2006.

5. The National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) – Nina Gustafsson Aberg

- Nina Gustafsson Aberg explained how ESIB had been involved as a consultative member of the Bologna process since Prague and was represented on BFUG and the Board. Representing the student voice, ESIB focused on training students to enable them to take part in the Process on equal terms. Concerned with equal opportunities and the social and economic condition of students the social dimension was also a priority for ESIB.
- ESIB was looking forward to working with students in the new member countries and hoped to make more contacts and increase membership.

6. The management and the implementation of the process on the European and on the national level

- Rachel Green (UK, former Chair of BFUG) gave an overview of the process at European and National levels. The Process was organised through BFUG and BFUG Board meetings, chaired by each EU Presidency. A meeting of Ministers taking place every two years to review progress and decide on the work priorities for the next period. The BFUG was responsible for agreeing a two year work programme in the light of each Ministerial meeting. It was important for there to be good links between the BFUG members and their Ministers, particularly during discussions about the communiqué that would be agreed at the Ministerial conferences. Ministerial sanction was also essential for members' contributions to BFUG. She explained how working groups

and seminars were organised, and described the relationship between BFUG and other groups. Although the working groups had already started their work, there might be scope for the newer countries to join if they wished to.

- The Bologna Secretariat supported the BFUG in implementing the work programme and was responsible for organising the next Ministerial conference. The Secretariat was available to answer questions at any time by email and provided information about the Process through its website. If any of the new members were interested in joining any of the working groups, contact information would be available from the Secretariat.

Georgia (Lela Maisuradze) asked if a Minister could attend Board meetings. The Chair advised that the Board did not function at a strategic level; its main role was to prepare meetings of BFUG. The Board was chaired by the country holding the Presidency and included the past and future Presidencies. Each year three additional Board members were elected by BFUG from BFUG members. The next election would be at the BFUG in April and country representatives of new countries were encouraged to put forward nominations.

7. Examples of good practice – Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe (CoE)

- Sjur Bergan gave a presentation on examples of good practice in implementing the Bologna Process and HE reforms. The participation of all stakeholders was important to the introduction of change in HE. It should not merely be imposed from the top. It was important to learn from the experience of others, but there was no one model for achieving the successful implementation of effective reforms. Bologna colleagues were also available to advise and share their experience. It was therefore important to attend meetings of BFUG and take part in Bologna seminars and other events.
- Setting up a national Bologna stakeholders group, with members nominated by the students and institutions as well as by the Ministry was a further example of good practice. For example, Denmark had set up a National coordination group of stakeholders, supported by two Ministers and including representatives from colleges, ENIC, students, teachers and labour market representatives. This brought together the opinions of all the stakeholders in the Bologna Process, and enabled the Danish BFUG representatives to represent their views in BFUG discussions.

EU Commission – Peter van der Hijden

- The European Commission (Peter van der Hijden) explained that the EC was supportive of the Bologna process, which it viewed as being closely aligned with the objectives of the Lisbon agenda. He listed the

potential help and project support available to new member countries. This included Tempus JEPS and Tempus SCM; Erasmus Mundus, Tuning and ECTS. Full details were available via links from the Bologna Secretariat website.

8. The Work Programme 2005 – 2007

The Chair introduced the work programme for 2005-2007 agreed by BFUG in October 2005. It comprised five working groups, eight seminars and projects on doctoral programmes and quality assurance, as well as priorities to be taken forward at national level. Member countries had also arranged seminars to take forward the development of the European Higher Education Area. Attendance was encouraged, particularly if the seminar theme related to strategic reforms or policy in the home country. BFUG members with responsibility for specific aspects of the work programme were invited to provide some further details about their projects.

Stocktaking working group - Andrejs Rauhvargers

- The stocktaking exercise would assess progress against the Ministerial priorities in the Bergen Communiqué on quality assurance, the three-cycle degree system and recognition of degrees and periods of study.
- Twelve high level indicators had been developed. A complete suite of indicators was currently out for comment amongst working group members. The working group would be coordinating comments on indicators and deciding on revisions, with a view to presenting a complete set of indicators to BFUG for adoption in April.
- All participating countries were expected to return their National Reports to the Secretariat by mid December 2006. Each country would be given an opportunity to comment on their score card entry in the stocktaking report before the report was published. Information for stocktaking would be taken from the National Reports produced for the London Ministerial conference, the Eurydice questionnaire and the ENIC/NARIC action plans on recognition.
- The Eurydice questionnaire would be issued to all 45 members in March and replies were expected back by the end of May 2006. However, there would be an opportunity to reflect on and update the information held by Eurydice before the stocktaking report was published in spring 2007.

TRENDS V and the ESIB survey (EUA and ESIB) – David Crosier EUA and Nina Gustafsson Aberg ESIB

- TRENDS V would provide an institutional perspective on implementation of the Bologna Process. The questionnaire element of the survey was currently with institutions for completion. A number of questions had been retained from the previous questionnaire issued

under Trends IV, to allow comparison with the results of the previous survey. The questionnaire would be followed up by a sample of site visits.

- Institutional site visits allowed more in depth analysis of Bologna developments. There was a lack of good contact information for universities and rectors in the new member countries. EUA asked new member countries to encourage their institutions to respond to the questionnaire and to provide contact lists. EUA also asked for help in setting up site visits.
- The ESIB survey would provide additional information for TRENDS V as well as stocktaking. The distribution was not as structured as EUA; contributors were approached at meetings, conferences and training sessions. Views from the students were generally different to the institutional view and critical of implementation. As EUA, ESIB sought contacts in unions and student organisations in the new countries.

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area – Mogens Berg

- The working group chair gave a presentation on how National Qualifications frameworks (NQF) should link with the overriding Bologna framework. It set out the basic principles and advised how an NQF could be developed with an overarching EHEA framework.

Quality Assurance – ENQA – Séamus Puirseil

- The providers of HE had prime responsibility for its standards and quality assurance. ENQA was set up as a supra-national agency and importantly as an independent body which will help institutions put in place standards and guidelines for quality assurance.
- A published handbook set out the European standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance within HE institutions as well as European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies, as agreed by Bologna Ministers in Bergen.
- Forthcoming meetings included ENQA Annual General Meeting 21-22 September 2006 and a conference in Munich 16-17 November.

Social Dimension – Annika Persson

- The working group chair gave a short presentation about the work programme comprising comparable data on the mobility of staff and students and the social and economic situation of students in participating countries which would contribute to the stocktaking exercise for the Ministerial conference in 2007.
- The group would welcome members from the new countries to extend its range.

- The group would also work with Eurostudent which had meanwhile grown to 30 countries, but was not extensive enough to be a source of comprehensive information.

External Dimension – Toril Johannsson

- This working group was looking at the attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with other parts of the world. The first meeting of the group would take place in February.
- There was evidence of considerable interest from countries outside Europe eg Latin America. An updated report would be presented at the next BFUG in April.

The Chair concluded that this was a presentation of progress to date and there would be more from the working groups and an update on Bologna progress at the next BFUG.

9. New member countries – outline of future plans

New member countries were invited to outline their plans for engaging in the Bologna Process.

Albania

- The two cycle model had been adopted and had been in place for about two years.
- An accreditation agency had yet to be set up, but the final decision was about to be taken by Ministers. The higher education sector was very small (10 HEIs only). The addition of an external element to accreditation and quality assurance was expected to be helpful.
- There was increasing student involvement in HEI governance.
- As part of a 10 year Master Plan for Higher Education, consideration was being given to setting up a National Higher Education Council, to act as an intermediate body between HEIs and Government. Higher education and research were currently separate. However, in future, they might be linked.
- The need for greater financial resource was a significant factor: budgets for HE were low (2.9% of GDP), but the Government wanted to increase investment.
- Funding for the HE sector came from the Government and tuition fees.
- Not all graduates had access to the second cycle. Entry was decided by Bachelor degree results and on the advice of the university.
- There had been an increase in student numbers, but the drop-out rate

was high at pre-university level.

- There were six private HEIs. In the past, some lecturers worked in both the private and the public sectors. Now, they could only work in one sector.

Azerbaijan

- The HE system of 24 public and 16 private HEIs had been highly centralised; this had provided the starting point for the transition process.
- A first step had been to ratify the Lisbon Convention and take measures to implement the Convention.
- In 1993, the two-cycle system was introduced in HE and in 1997 the first students graduated with a Bachelor degree diploma.
- Azerbaijan was looking for a method to implement a complimentary credit system and sought the assistance of Bologna colleagues. There were still issues around quality assurance and recognition of studies for students who study abroad.
- Internal quality assurance was the responsibility of HEIs. External quality assurance was the responsibility of the Ministry, but this was under review.
- Approximately 20% of the state budget was allocated to education.
- Each university had its own student association, as well as a state and national association.
- The student participation rate was about 40%, of whom about 5% dropped out.
- Students from some 37 countries were studying in Azerbaijan, mainly from eastern European and Arabic Countries.

Georgia

- Georgia had started a programme of education reforms in line with the Bologna goals prior to joining the Bologna Process. Legislation in line with Bologna had been introduced in December 2004. The process of implementing the legislation had shown there were some shortcomings and some amendments were required.
- A new finance model was being developed, which would include portable student grants.
- By introducing new accreditation arrangements, the number of institutions had halved to around 170 since independence. The

number of HEIs was expected to reduce further still.

- Unified national admission exams had been introduced, to ensure fairness.
- There were a number of challenges still to be addressed. They included a lack of academic and administrative staff in HEIs; poor understanding of the terms autonomy and accountability; a lack of partnership between HEIs; and outdated curricula and resources.
- Hopefully the establishment of a Rector's Conference will address the problem of not enough partnerships between HEIs.
- Regular meetings with stakeholders had been taking place and a website had been set up, address as follows:

<http://www.bologna-supporters.ge/Eng/index.htm>

Ukraine

- Full details of the current situation in the Ukraine were given in their application to join the Bologna Process.
- A primary aim was to gain more constructive support from university Rectors and academics for the practical implementation of the Bologna Process. A support structure had been set up to facilitate this. Students were involved in that support structure. Authority for self government by HEIs had been established through special changes to Ukraine's Law "On Higher Education" (February, 2006).
- The intention was to identify a lead HEI in each region to spread good practice and take the lead on implementing Bologna reforms in that area.
- There was increasing use of ECTS and work was under way to align professional qualifications with the Bachelor degrees.
- There were a number of challenges to overcome. They included increasing the employability of the new Bachelor graduates; better alignment between school and Bachelor curricula; reducing the variability in the quality of HEIs; and improving the social and economic situation of students. These would require significant cultural change – a process that would take time.
- There were 232 state and municipal HEIs and 113 private institutions; this allowed a participation rate of about 60% of school leavers. Funding for education was around 6.5% of GDP.

The new member country representatives warmly thanked the Chair and Sjur Bergan and the Council of Europe for organising the seminar.

The chair remarked that impressive progress had been made around Europe among the Bologna members with changes and developments since Bergen. It was hoped that new country representatives would be at the next BFUG in April in Vienna.

Bologna Secretariat