

Advisory Group 1: EHEA International cooperation

Ninth Meeting

London (U.K), 19 February 2018

Draft Minutes

List of participants

COUNTRY/ ORGANISATION	NAME
BELGIUM VL	Noel VERCRUYSE
BFUG SECRETARIAT	Françoise PROFIT
BFUG SECRETARIAT	Mariana SAAD
CYPRUS	Stelios CHRISTOPHIDES
EI/ETUCE	Mike JENNINGS
ENQA	Maria KELO
ESU	Caroline SUNDBERG
EUA/European University Association	Henriette STOEBER
EU COMMISSION	Marlène BARTES
FRANCE chair	Marie-Odile OTT
GERMANY	Katrin FOHMANN
GREECE	Alexandra KARVOUNI
IRELAND	Gerry O'SULLIVAN
OECD	Shane SAMUELSON
UNITED KINGDOM chair	Ella RITCHIE

Apologies received from ACA, Azerbaijan, AUF/ Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, EAIE, Estonia, IAU, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, UfM and UNESCO.

1. Welcome and Adoption of the Agenda

The British chair welcomed the participants and proceeded to the adoption of the agenda. The Spanish chair was not able to attend the meeting and had sent her apologies. The agenda was adopted.

2. Feedback from the BFUG Board meeting and the BFUG meeting

The British chair explained that she attended the January Board meeting in Belgrade on behalf of the group. She reported that the Board members were broadly supportive of the group's work as a constructive discussion on the concept notes took place. The main comments concerned the fact that some points played out differently in some countries and that the concept notes might be too focused on the EHEA while the BPF was about opening the debate to countries outside the Area.

The French chair then reported on the February BFUG meeting in Sofia. She informed the participants that the Spanish chair presented the concept notes to the BFUG members who did not make comments

3. Final discussion on the concept notes

The representative for the European Commission asked for clarification regarding the purpose of the concept notes. The British chair replied that they would be used for briefing the people attending the round table and suggested that speakers should be given additional information. Several members of the group approved the idea.

After a question on when the final version would be ready, the British chair announced that the chairs would decide a date to come back to the group with a final version.

4. Update on the invitations and keynote speaker

The French chair explained that she had received comments from several members of the group about this list of countries and organisations established by France. She told the group that invitations to organisations would be sent that same week. She also informed that the keynote speaker had been invited but that no answer had been received yet. To a question about how many countries had already replied to the invitation for the BPF, she answered that Thailand, Dominican Republic, Mali, the Republic of Guinea, Egypt and Nigeria had manifested their interest although none confirmed their participation yet.

The representative for the European Commission asked for a table giving the dates at which the invitations were sent, the names of the people contacted and the responses. She also stressed that the EU Commission was not allowed to contact Syria. In a further exchange other participants pointed that although cooperation with Syria at university level was not a problem, any interaction at political level was difficult to handle.

The ESU representative reminded the chairs that her organisation had provided a list with organisations they would like to see invited at the BPF and pointed that the invitations needed to be sent soon as students representatives needed to organise their travel early for budget reasons.

The representative for EI remarked that it was crucial to secure a keynote speaker and advised the group to think about a plan B.

The representative for the European Commission stressed that inviting Beatrice Njenga Head of Education at the African Union Commission as a keynote speaker would help highlight the African/EU partnership.

5. Drafting of the BPF Statement

The British chair introduced the discussion with an overview of the 75 comments received for the first draft of the Statement. She rewrote it accordingly but stressed this was not an easy task as many were contradictory and several comments arrived quite late leaving little time before the London meeting to integrate them.

She listed the critics that came more often: the statement seemed too long, too focused on the EHEA, not saying enough on the role of the BPF, not forward looking enough, too cautious, needing to be clearer on what the BPF should achieve, too repetitive, too self-praising, not strategic enough.

She then presented the topics the group should discuss for the next draft: was the Statement ambitious enough?; should the group set it in the context of the Agenda 2030 (IAU's comment) or UNESCO SDG's?; how much should the Statement mention other international organisations?; how much should it fit with the BFUG communiqué?; was the Statement detailed enough about the next steps ?; was there enough on sharing values (good governance, university autonomy, freedom to study, research and student participation)-which, she stressed, was a big political question and quite difficult to address in this context.

5.1: General comments

Several members of the group thanked the British chair for the work done on the Statement. It was agreed not to comment the draft line by line and to focus on the topics instead.

The representative for EI stated that his organisation would like values and principles of higher education mentioned in the Statement.

The representative for Cyprus argued that non-EHEA countries needed to be given more importance and proposed to use paragraph 1 for that purpose. He also pointed out that both the list of countries as established and the Statement did not take enough into account several geographical and diplomatic issues related to the Mediterranean region.

The representative for the OECD argued that the text was still not sharp enough and that it needed to highlight the topics chosen for the round tables. She stressed that the Statement had to put forward that the EHEA was keen on engaging a dialogue with other regions and countries about important issues.

Several members of the group made comments in the same vein.

The British chair thanked for the remarks and agreed to change the text accordingly.

The ESU representative argued for mentioning qualification frameworks and other instruments promoted inside the EHEA that are also of interest for other regions.

5.2: Comments paragraph by paragraph

Following the general discussion on the Statement, the group proceeded to comment it paragraph by paragraph.

- First paragraph:

It was agreed to include a new sentence on "priorities". The group discussed two proposals to call the signatories from the EHEA: partners or members states. It was also decided to replace "two way dialogue" by "multilateral dialogue".

The representative from the OECD proposed to mention in the second sentence on the state of the world that we are facing a particular period of diminution of trust in higher education. The representative for EI strongly disagreed with this proposal and reminded the participants that they had to be careful not to write anything that could be taken out of context and backfire on the BPF or the EHEA.

- Second paragraph:

It was decided that this paragraph would be on the aim of the AG1 and the BPF as it was designed by the group.

Many changes were made during the meeting. It was agreed to use the historic present.

- Third Paragraph:

It was agreed that this paragraph should focus on internationalisation. The OECD representative stressed that the paragraph needed to be introduced with a strong statement about the BPF's commitment to bring people together. She also pointed that several topics related to the general theme were not mentioned in the draft e.g. transnational education, exchanges of students and collaboration in research.

Several other changes making the statement more general and political were agreed upon.

It was decided that the third paragraph would be on what the BPF does to solve the problems listed in the second paragraph.

At some stage in the discussion the draft seemed too vague to some of the participants who also pointed that a presentation of the aims of the BPF should be included in this paragraph.

The importance of having a media release specific for this event was also mentioned.

- Last paragraphs of the Statement:

The following discussion was centered on the topics that needed to be present in the Statement but were not addressed in the first three paragraphs.

Some of the participants asked whether the past BPFs should be mentioned as it was a usual feature in the previous Statements.

Topics already mentioned in the first part of the discussion but that had not been included in the new three paragraphs were examined again and added to the new version. These were: academic freedom; the topics of the two round tables; the importance of setting a dialogue between the EHEA and non-EHEA countries; the aim of coming up with a common agenda at the end of the BPF.

The rest of the discussion concerned exclusion in several forms and contexts. The participants stressed that today the accent was put on students not only accessing higher education but also being successful in their studies as completion and employability are strongly linked. It was also agreed to keep the mention of “migrants and refugees” as it would be odd not to include them in an international conference.

6. AOB

It was agreed that the British chair was in full charge of writing the next versions of the BPF Statement. The OECD representative volunteered to help if need be.

The Secretariat was asked to come up with a revised version of the roadmap taking into account several new deadlines and to circulate it by the end of the week to the group.

It was agreed that the new version of the draft would be sent to the group by the 26th February.