

Meeting of the Bologna Follow-up Group Meeting

18-19 February 2010

Ministry of Education, Madrid

REPORT

Malta was represented by Dr Philip von Brockdorff Chairman NCHE and Dr James Calleja Chief Executive, Malta Qualifications Council.

Report prepared by James Calleja.

Welcome and introduction to the meeting

1. Information by the Spanish Presidency

The Spanish Presidency gave an overview of the programme on education particularly in times of economic crisis. He spoke about issues related to access and mobility, investment in higher education institutions (HE) and quality assurance encouraging members of the Bologna Process to ensure that the decisions taken since 1999 are implemented within the established deadlines.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted as drafted

3. Outcome of proceedings of the BFUG meeting in Brussels 30 November-1st December 2009

The outcomes were accepted without questions or discussions.

4. Application of membership by Kazakhstan

The Council of Europe (COE) explained that there are no stumbling blocks to accept Kazakhstan to be accepted as a member of the Bologna Process (BP). The country is making some quite interesting efforts in structural reforms in HEIs and is committed to implement all goals of the BP. Their report to the COE shows a serious commitment towards the BP. Therefore Kazakhstan will be accepted as a member at the end of the process of ratification of the European Cultural Convention. On questions asked the COE replied that member states of the convention decide on access of new members; this is a political process which is broad and inclusive. One speaker underlined the point

that since Kazakhstan opted for a European model we should accept their eagerness to join the BP.

There was generally agreement that COE can move forward the process with Kazakhstan.

5. Independent assessment of the Bologna Process

The report will be available before the Ministerial Conference. The report (drafted by independent assessors) is based on compatibility, comparability and attractiveness of the BP. There are different responses to 'speed' and implementation of the BP by different member states. Reactions from the floor focused on the fact that the report does not capture many of the achievements of the BP and that the Bologna Experts should be consulted before publishing the report. COE agreed with the summary of the report in which it illustrates major efforts by member states as well as further targets to be achieved in the coming years. The Secretariat will take note of the final draft. There were no further comments on this item.

6. Preliminary information on reports to be submitted to Ministers

(1) *Focus Report on HE in 2010 – the impact of the Bologna Process – David Crosier.*

The speaker spoke of the impact of the BP and the expansion of HE institutions. The Bologna tools were mentioned (ECTS, Diploma Supplement...) as well as issues related to access, mobility and transparency (quality assurance) as well as students' perspectives. Noteworthy is that the three-cycle system has been implemented across all 46 member states. There are varied understanding of social dimension issues from country to country. There is lack of data about funding LLL and peripheral interest in such a process in many countries. On mobility the speaker remarked that there is more policy than information; few countries have adopted the 20% benchmark. On the economic crisis countries have responded that some had increases in their HE budget, others decreases or drastic decreases but there are some caveats on this information and countries vary in their approach to this global financial problem. There is little impact so far on student support during this economic crisis. There is of course the need for better and more coherent data to inform policy and European cooperation.

Delegates showed appreciation for the report which is very informative and asked whether it could be placed on the Bologna website. *ESU* highlighted the fact that the students' role is not comprehensive; *Education International* remarked that the academic staff is invisible from the report and therefore who is implementing this process? *ENQA* said that this report fills an important gap in quality assurance particularly in the role of independent agencies – the link between design and

purpose of independent institutions is made clear in the report. *EURASHE* informed delegates that its own report focuses on ten targets to be shared with Ministers based on feedback from the over 800 *EURASHE* members. *ESU*'s report focuses on governance and students' participation, employability, transparency, financing as well as Bologna relationship with other HE processes outside Bologna. The report is based on direct students' perspectives (interviews with students) on the BP itself. *Business Europe* found the draft students' report interesting particularly the theme of students and employability. *International Education* said that students' role is important for the BP and this role needs to be made more visible (together with that of academics) as the two main actors of the BP (rather than governments and Bologna experts only). *EUA* agreed with *EI* about these 'unsung heroes' of the BP and emphasized the need for focus on students' services and academic staff working environments. *COE* thanked all bodies for the reports and suggested that there should be more convergence between the reports. It would be interesting to compare the reports and make suggestions to strengthen the *EHEA*.

7. Budapest Vienna Declaration

The discussion focused on the Budapest/Vienna Declaration paragraph by paragraph.

Germany and Holland remarked that there is no balance between the positives and negatives of the BP; it should be a more realistic declaration. *ESU* believes that the tone of the text is also too optimistic. The UK also believes that there is improvement in this text and said that they are happy with the final text. The Holy See supports *ESU*'s proposal. Belgium asked about the difference between a communiqué and a declaration. Many suggested that at this point one should avoid any philosophical arguments. **Malta** made a suggestion concerning the wording of the last sentence of point 6 in which the words 'adjustment and continuous' work should be replaced by the words 'further work'. This would avoid mentioning the word 'adjustment' which denotes substantial restructuring. Other delegates reiterated the importance of including the students' role; *EI* objected to the changes suggested by Malta saying that some countries require serious adjustments to come in line with the Bologna spirit. Latvia observed that from a realist point of view that although adjustments might be needed yet achievements have been significantly registered. *CION* acknowledges that there are shortcomings in the BP but one should highlight the positives – *CION* suggested to delete the phrase – 'developments that are not in line with the Bologna spirit' since nowhere have we defined what the Bologna spirit is all about. Greece objected to the inclusion of a statement on strong students' participation. *COE* agreed that students' role should only be reasonably important. *EI* emphasized the words *flexibility* and *sustainability* in the defining the BP in paragraph 10. Many others agreed to retain both words in paragraph 10. Greece objected stating that the group should come up with a different word to flexible. *COE*

suggested *professional and personal learning paths*. Finally, Greece agreed with the word *adaptability* instead of flexibility suggested by one of the delegates. The discussion then focused on the use of public responsibility rather than 'public good'. Delegates agreed that *public responsibility* is a stronger statement than *public good* as it reflects action and accountability. The debate in July 2009 at UNESCO on refusing the term *public good* was meant to protect HEIs from falling into a purely private enterprise (or private initiative) based on the US model.

Several other interventions focused on the construction of sentences, semantics and the use of particular words rather than others. This was a particularly long but inevitable session at this level of negotiation between so many diverse 'cultures and systems of HE'. The Chair suggested that the recommendations/changes will be discussed again in tomorrow's session.

The discussion continued the day after almost 27 interventions on paragraph 6 of the Declaration. **Malta** intervened twice on paragraph 6 (Draft Declaration) to underline the fact that the Declaration should not send a negative message or give the impression that Ministers move because of protests or failure on the part of stakeholders to implement measures set by the BP. Furthermore there were protests in some and not all countries. At the end of the discussion on this issue, the sentence was amended to reflect a more positive message.

There were no further changes to the last draft version.

A discussion followed on the draft *Bologna Policy Forum Statement*. There were no significant amendments to the Statement.

8. Budapest/Vienna Ministerial Meeting and Second Bologna Policy Forum

Details were given to the delegations on the logistical arrangements in Budapest and Vienna. This information has been sent to all delegations. As there will be several large students' protests particularly in Vienna, delegations are asked to make use of the transport system provided by the host countries. Security will be stepped up at all times particularly when Heads of Delegations will be asked to address students in a restricted public space within the Hungarian Parliament.

There was a brief discussion on the Bologna Policy Forum Statement. The aim of the Forum is to connect the BP with other regions of the world. There were no particular issues raised by delegations that merit noting. The draft Statement was approved unanimously.

Participants from outside the 46 Bologna Members (and as far as India, China, the US, Colombia etc...) will also be present at the Forum.

9. 2012 Report on the Implementation of the Bologna Process – draft outline and timetable

The BFUG Implementation Group has started working; the mechanism and structure have been put in place to produce the Implementation Report; the report will gather information from different sources ENQA, EURYDICE and the Stocktaking Report. It will lead to a report of indicators and data from those providers (into one report) organized into one domain. Statistics will be a main feature but these will be contextualized into more qualitative information on students' progression and employability. Indicators will be the main feature of this Report. The main thrust of the Report will be the established benchmarks agreed by the BFUG. The final approval of the *indicators* will be in the next BFUG meeting in August 2010.

Education International remarked that it is very strange that this Report has left out again statistical data concerning teachers and staff in HEIs. The Implementation Group (IG) spokesperson replied that such statistics may also be included if agreed by the BFUG but this an added burden for HEIs or governments. We should not overburden the system but if the group feels that this is necessary then we should go for this data. Greece and Holland supported EI on this issue. However the IG insisted that at this point in time gathering such information might not be feasible.

The outline and themes were approved.

10. Mobility benchmark

The speaker referred to the work of the two working group. Benchmarking 20% mobility by 2020 is the target of the BP. At different moments in time Europe will have different percentages of mobility. Mobility is defined as degree or diploma mobility. The report will indicate statistical data on students obtaining HEI degrees from different European Universities in different countries; credit mobility will indicate one or more recognized credit from different HEIs. Degree and credit mobility will form the backbone of this report. Learners will be defined as mobile if they obtain degrees and credits from different HEIs in different countries. We are measuring physical mobility but not distance learning. The benchmark indicator would require Eurostat and other international statistics/data organizations to adjust their methods of gathering data. Such organizations have been informed of these political adjustments to which they have agreed to. Data from this project will be available after 2012. Finally mobility will also cover other points of view such as qualitative analysis of issues such as the social dimension.

Delegations showed appreciation for the work undertaken by this group. FR asked whether it is possible to change the methodology in measuring mobility of students who have been mobile during the first and the second cycle and not just for one cycle at a time. In response, the working group (WG) replied that they are not following a cohort approach but take a snapshot of a mobility experience. This is a critical point in the survey and could be changed to reflect a wider and more realistic picture of mobility. ES suggested that credits should also be included in the third cycle but in response to this question the WG replied that many countries do not find credits appropriate to the third cycle. ES insisted that this is a matter of definition. SL and LT also agreed to include credits in the third cycle and to measure mobility during the third cycle. LT defined mobility in a broader context including also work-based mobility and national mobility. The WG said that figures for incoming mobility will be counted but not for the purpose of the 20% benchmark. So far the 20% will be that reflecting outbound mobility only. A discussion on mobility within the third cycle will take place within the WG. The political message at this stage of this project is to create more awareness among HEIs through statistical data.

11. The EHEA in a global context

(a) EHEA information and promotion network

The text given to BFUG was agreed at the Working Group level. There were no further comments to the document and therefore BFUG approved the initiative of the Bologna Secretariat (BS). The aim of this network is to make use of all Bologna Experts (from all 46 countries) for requests coming from outside the BP to talk about the EHEA. Delegates suggested that BFUG members should have access to the list of experts and that the BS should consult BFUG members before suggesting names.

(b) Providing expertise on Bologna process and EHEA outside the EHEA countries

See note (a).

12. BFUG representatives as observers to the EQAR Register Committee

Five nominations were received which means that the number of observers would satisfy the established number by BFUG. Since there were no other nominations there was no need for an election. The Chair reminded delegations that it is compulsory that these persons attend all meetings; no alternates can be nominated as those elected will serve in their BFUG function.

BFUG agreed to the nominated BFUG representatives.

13. Recommendation 1892 (2009) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe *Contribution of the Council of Europe to the Development of the EHEA.*

Sjur Bergen (COE) gave an overview of this Recommendation which is included in the meeting material. After a brief discussion it was agreed that the COE should continue to play a supporting and consultative role in the development of the EHEA.

14. Updates from EC, consultative members, EQAR (written contributions only)

The contributions on EQAR were included in the documents of the BFUG meeting.

15. Next BFUG Meeting, Alden Biesen 24-25 August 2010

The next meeting will be held in Belgium. The agenda will be sent before the start of the holidays. A conference on *Mobility* will also be organized in Antwerp on the 5th and 6th of October.

16. Any other business

- 25-26 April 2010 there will be a Ministerial Conference on Euro-Med Research and Innovation focused on an agenda for the region. The meeting will be held in Slovenia. BFUG members are invited to alert their Ministers to appoint someone to participate.

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