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WORK PROGRAMME 2003-2005 FOR THE BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP

1. BACKGROUND

In the communiqué from their Berlin Conference on 19 September 2003, Ministers responsible for higher education asked the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to co-ordinate activities for progress of the Bologna Process as indicated in the themes and actions covered by the communiqué and to report on them in time for the next Ministerial Conference in 2005.

1.1. Priorities

The Ministers defined three intermediate priorities for the next two years: quality assurance, the two-cycle degree system and recognition of degrees and periods of studies. Specified goals were set for each of these action lines. A stocktaking exercise will be organised before the next Ministerial Conference.

1.1.1. Quality assurance

The primary responsibility for quality assurance lies with the institutions. The Ministers pledged to support further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved;
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results;
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, international participation, co-operation and networking.

The Ministers called for the development of an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and a report back through the BFUG to the Ministerial Conference in 2005.

1.1.2. The two-cycle system

The Ministers encouraged the member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems. They also asked for the elaboration of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs. The Ministers invited the BFUG to explore how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework for the EHEA.

1.1.3. Recognition of degrees and periods of studies

The Ministers underlined the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process. Every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge.

1.1.4. The third cycle

The Ministers also considered it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process and to promote closer links between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA).

The priorities mentioned are reflected in the BFUG Work Programme.

1.2. The Bologna Action Lines

Six action lines were introduced in the Bologna Declaration:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles;
3. Establishment of a system of credits;
4. Promotion of mobility;
5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
6. Promotion of the European dimension in higher education.

Three more were introduced in the Prague Communiqué:

7. Lifelong learning;
8. Higher education institutions and students;
9. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

A tenth action line was introduced in the Berlin Communiqué:

10. Doctoral studies and the synergy between the EHEA and the ERA.

The social dimension of higher education might be seen as an overarching or transversal action line.

The various action lines of the Bologna Process, including the social dimension, are reflected in the BFUG Work Programme.

2. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

The recommendations of the Communiqué are directed at national authorities, institutions and organisations. Countries and organisations should feel free to launch relevant follow-up activities in accordance with the Berlin Communiqué. This active participation of all partners will ensure the long-term success of the Bologna Process. A number of such activities of general interest to all Bologna member countries and organisations are included in the BFUG Work Programme.

2.1. Co-ordination by the BFUG

Members and consultative members of the Bologna Process may initiate most of the actions included in the Work Programme, and as such, it is basically a bottom-up process. However, the BFUG must ensure that the Work Programme relates in the best possible way to the Berlin Communiqué as a whole. The Work Programme should also have a reasonable balance between the various action lines of the Bologna Process.

It is clear from the Berlin Communiqué that the Ministers envisaged that the BFUG should take responsibility for co-ordination of actions in the following areas:

- developing an overarching framework of qualifications;
- the stocktaking exercise;
- monitoring the ENQA project on quality assurance.

The BFUG should also take an overall responsibility for ensuring that new member countries are supported.

Furthermore, the BFUG should be aware of initiatives by other organisations that may have an impact on its Work Programme, and must establish appropriate co-ordinating mechanisms with such organisations.

3. THE BFUG WORK PROGRAMME

3.1. Bologna Follow-up Seminars

Seminars were the main vehicle for the follow-up of the Prague Communiqué, and will also be an important element in the follow-up after Berlin. *Bologna Follow-up Seminars* may be organised by individual member countries or consultative member organisations in accordance with their own priorities and objectives, taking account of the criteria approved by the BFUG, see Criteria for Bologna Follow-up Seminars 2003-2005.

The EU Commission may support a limited number of Bologna Follow-up Seminars in priority areas. The deadline for proposals to Socrates-Tempus is 16 April 2004.

3.1.1. Bologna Follow-up Seminars in the BFUG Work Programme 2003-2005

A limited number of Bologna Follow-up Seminars are included in the BFUG Work Programme. For these seminars,

- the theme is of general interest to the members and consultative members of the Bologna Process;
- the programme builds on previous seminars on the same theme where relevant;
- participation should be free of charge.

Responsibility for organising these seminars is widely spread among participating countries and organisations.

Having regard to the limited time available, the BFUG decided in its meeting on 9 March 2004 that the following seminars should be treated as central to the conduct of the BFUG Work Programme, in that they reflect the priorities set by the Ministers in Berlin and have the potential of contributing most to the realisation of the European Higher Education Area:

1. *“Joint degrees – Further development”*
(Sweden, 6-7 May 2004)
2. *”Bologna and the challenges of eLearning and distance education”*
(Belgium-Fl, 4-5 June 2004)
3. *“Using Learning Outcomes”* (UK, 1-2 July 2004)
4. *“Assessment and accreditation in the European framework”*
(Spain, 28-30 July 2004)
5. *“Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research”*
(Council of Europe, 23-24 Sept 2004)
6. *“Mobility”* (The Netherlands, 11-12 Oct 2004)
7. *“Employability and its link to the objectives of the Bologna Process”*
(Slovenia, 22-23 Oct 2004)
8. *“New Generations of Policy Documents and Laws for Higher Education:
Their Thrust in the Context of the Bologna Process”*
(UNESCO-CEPES/EUA/Council of Europe, 4-6 Nov 2004)
9. *“Bachelor’s Degree: What is it?”* (Russia, 23-24 Nov 2004)
10. *“Improving the Recognition System”* (Latvia, 3-4 Dec 2004)
11. *“European Qualifications Framework”*
(Denmark, 13-14 Jan 2005)
12. *“The social dimension of higher education facing world-wide competition”*
(France, 27-28 Jan 2005)
13. *“Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society”*
(Austria/Germany/EUA, 3-5 Feb 2005)
14. *“Co-operation between accreditation agencies”* (Poland, 14-15 Feb 2005)

3.2. Bologna Projects

3.2.1. ENQA project on standards, procedures and guidelines in quality assurance

ENQA, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, is an instrument for co-operation between national organisations in the field of quality assurance. ENQA was given a special mandate by the Berlin Communiqué: “Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and

to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005. Due account will be taken of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks.”

ENQA presented its work plan for the realisation of this mandate to the BFUG on 14 November 2003, reported on progress at the BFUG meeting on 9 March 2004 and will report to consecutive BFUG meetings, with a final report in time for the BFUG to consider the report and advise the Ministerial Conference on 19-20 May 2005.

3.2.2. An overarching framework of qualifications

In the Berlin Communiqué, the Ministers asked for the elaboration of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. They also invited the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of this qualifications framework. With reference to lifelong learning, they asked for flexible learning paths within the qualifications framework for the EHEA.

Initiatives have been taken in this area by the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and by the Joint Quality Initiative. The Danish Ministry has offered to facilitate further development as a follow-up of the Copenhagen seminar in March 2003 with a view to elaborating a European Qualifications Framework for higher education. The Joint Quality Initiative organised a first meeting to discuss the development of such a framework. The work should also build on the background research paper for the Irish Presidency Conference on 8 March 2004.

At its meeting on 9 March 2004, the BFUG agreed to establish a Working Group to coordinate the work to develop an Overarching Framework of Qualifications for the EHEA and report back to the BFUG. Recognising their key role, this Working Group will be chaired by Denmark, and draw on external expertise as it feels appropriate.

The EU Commission has indicated its willingness to support the design of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Area against which national frameworks would articulate. The Commission also supports other initiatives enhancing the comparability and compatibility of qualifications and notably the project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe", in which university teachers seek to describe the content of qualifications in nine different subject areas in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. This is seen as a very valuable supplement to the more general approach of the Bologna Process.

3.2.3. Supporting new member countries

Membership of the Bologna Process implies substantial change and reform for all signatory countries. The Ministers pledged to support the new signatory countries in those changes and reforms, incorporating them in the mutual discussions and assistance of the Bologna Process.

The Council of Europe has already organised follow-up seminars after Berlin for the new member countries in South-East Europe, and also a seminar for the Ukraine. UNESCO-CEPES and the EUA are planning a seminar for South-East European Universities in April 2004, and together with the Council of Europe another seminar in the Ukraine in May. The Chair and the Secretariat have taken steps to organise special pre-meetings for delegations from the same countries. The Secretariat will also co-operate with member countries and organisations to inform about the Bologna Process. These activities will be reported back to the BFUG.

3.3. Other Initiatives Impacting on the BFUG Work Programme

Partners in the Bologna Process have taken a number of separate initiatives impacting on the BFUG Work Programme. Such initiatives represents an opportunity for the BFUG work programme, both in terms of assistance and complementarity. For this reason, it is important that the results of these actions are notified to the Chair or Vice-Chair of BFUG. Some such initiatives are identified below.

3.3.1. Recognition of degrees and study periods

In Berlin, the Ministers underlined the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process, and called on the ENIC and NARIC networks along with the competent national authorities to further the implementation of the Convention. Based on the co-operation in the ENIC/NARIC networks, important subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Convention are being developed, notably the draft text on Recognition of Joint Degrees.

Since the Berlin summit, a UNESCO/OECD project has been initiated to set up international guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education, which will also impact on recognition, building on the Lisbon Convention and similar conventions for other regions of the world. Keeping close contact with these developments should be very useful for the BFUG.

3.3.2. Appropriate studying and living conditions for students

In the Berlin Communiqué, the Ministers stressed the need for appropriate studying and living conditions for the students, so that they can successfully complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background. They also stressed the need for more comparable data on the social and economic situation of students. The ESIB Student Bologna Survey (September 2003) underlines this need.

Comparative data on student financing for the EU/EEA countries are available in a Eurydice report from July 1999. An updating and extension of this report would be of great interest to the BFUG, but this will not be feasible before the Bergen Ministerial Conference. The BFUG may consider alternative sources for obtaining an overview of this important element of the social dimension.

3.3.3. EU report on European co-operation in quality assurance

The EU Commission is about to present a report to the EU Parliament and the Council of Ministers on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education. The report will contain proposals on how to make European quality assurance more coherent in line with the commitments made by Ministers in Bologna, Prague and Berlin, and may have a direct bearing on the ENQA project and the BFUG Work Programme.

3.3.4. EUA project on doctoral programmes

Doctoral programmes are essential to the development of both the EHEA and the ERA, providing a key link between these two processes. The EUA has devised a project to examine the development of doctoral programmes in view of the increasing demands and challenges in Europe. To address the needs of research training in a rapidly transforming knowledge society, it is important to look carefully at the existing structures of the programmes. The primary

objective of this project, funded by the EU Commission, is to help European universities to improve the quality of doctoral programmes.

3.4. Topics for discussion and recommendation in the BFUG

Some topics may benefit from special discussion in a BFUG meeting, either for clarification or for a possible recommendation. A discussion on globalisation might for instance be useful, as quality assurance and recognition go beyond the European Higher Education Area. The BFUG may also want to establish procedures in certain fields, for instance in relation to candidate members, European NGOs and out-of-region organisations. A basis for such discussions may either be a document prepared by the Secretariat or an oral presentation by an invited expert.

4. STOCKTAKING

The Ministers charged the Follow-up Group with organising a stocktaking process in time for their summit in 2005 and undertaking to prepare detailed reports on the progress and implementation of the intermediate priorities set for the period.

In its meeting on 9 March 2004, the BFUG decided that the Follow-up Group itself will take responsibility for the conduct of the stocktaking exercise. Detailed reports will be prepared on the progress and implementation of the intermediate priorities set in the three priority areas defined for the period 2003-2005: quality assurance, the two-cycle degree system and recognition of degrees and periods of study.

The BFUG appointed a working group to carry out the stocktaking and report back to the BFUG. The Working Group will draw on expertise as appropriate, and will be assisted in its task by the BFUG Secretariat. Its report will form the basis for a report by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Bergen in 2005, and should provide a clear and objective overview of the progress made in the signatory States. In line with previous conferences, the consultative members may present their own reports.

The EU Commission has indicated its willingness to support the undertaking of a coherent stocktaking exercise in close co-operation with the BFUG.

5. REPORTING TO THE 2005 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

The General Report on BFUG Activities 2003-2005 will be a short report on all activities in the Work Programme, to which recommendations from seminars and reports on the stocktaking and other projects may be appended. This report will be drafted by the Secretariat and submitted to the BFUG for approval.

National reports should be submitted to the BFUG in good time before the Bergen Conference. A common format for the 2005 reports from member countries will be defined, and the Secretariat will produce a draft format as soon as possible.

A recent Eurydice report, *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2003/04: National Trends in the Bologna Process*, gives an overall picture of the situation in higher education in 29 countries before Berlin. An updated report, extended to cover all Bologna

member countries, may be expected before the Bergen Ministerial Conference. National reports for 2005 should not duplicate the Eurydice effort, but supplement it.

The Chair and the Secretariat will co-ordinate with the EUA the preparation of the *Trends 2005* report and the reporting to be carried out by the BFUG.

The preparatory drafting of the Berlin Communiqué was delegated to an ad hoc working group assisting the BFUG in this important task. For the Bergen Communiqué, the Board will take responsibility for the preparatory drafting. However, it may also appoint a small Working Group to undertake this task.

Reports to the Ministerial Conference on 19-20 May 2005 will be considered and approved by the Bologna Follow-up Group in its meetings on 1-2 March and 8-9 April 2005.