



BOLOGNA PROCESS
Expert Network on Student Support

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT NETWORK
ON STUDENT SUPPORT 2007-2009**

Summary

The Expert Network on Student Support was established during a meeting of interested countries and organisations in Lisbon on 2 October 2007.

The Network met again in Stockholm on 22 & 23 January 2008 and in Glasgow on 16 March 2009.

The Network was chaired jointly by representatives from the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden. The following actions were undertaken:

Information Data Base

- The Network agreed on the most important data needed by experts on student financial support for their everyday work.
- A template was produced to facilitate the exchange of data.
- 13 templates were completed by countries participating in the Network of Experts on students support.
- In cooperation with the BFUG Secretariat, the templates have been posted on the password-protected BFUG website.

Data sharing

- The Network agreed on a blueprint for data-exchange specifying the information needed by countries to establish if there is reason to believe a student has a double grant.
- A template on data-protection was developed that helps participating countries to illustrate their demands in the field of data-protection.

Bologna Seminar on Mobility, Brussels, 29-30 May 2008

- At the seminar, the work of the Network was presented by four of its members (Sweden, Scotland, Netherlands and Georgia).
- One of the main areas highlighted was the need for more consistent collection of data from countries on portability of student support and that this should be part of the wider BFUG data collection activities.

Future Steps

- Encourage more countries to join the Network .
- Make full use of the Bologna website www.bologna2009benelux.org to disseminate the available information.
- Find means to establish consistent data collection on portability of student support.

The joint Chair of the Network 2007-2009,

Jessica ten Bosch-de Jong, the Netherlands, j.b.tenbosch@minocw.nl
Kathleen Robertson, Scotland, kathleen.robertson@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Johanna Wockatz, Sweden, johanna.wockatz@education.ministry.se

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Members of the Network (as at 1 April 2009): Austria, Belgium/Flemish Community, Belgium/French Community, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, England, European Commission, ESU, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Sweden

1. Introduction to the report

After a brief presentation of the background and history of the Expert Network on Student Support (Expert Network), this report provides an overview of the activities of the Expert Network and its various project groups in the period 2007-2009. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations for a sustainable Network.

2. Background

Portability of grants and loans – From Berlin via Bergen to London (2003-2007)

Mobility of students has always played a key role in the Bologna Process. In Berlin and Bergen the Ministers made a commitment to bring the facilitating of grants and loans forward in Europe:

*'[...] we confirm our commitment to facilitate the portability of grants and loans where appropriate through joint action, with a view to making mobility within the EHEA a reality.'*¹

The Bologna Process went through different stages of working. In the first stage conferences and seminars were organised to develop plans how to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), to exchange information, and to get into contact with each other. The second stage the Bologna Process went through was the stage of working groups.

This method was also applied to the matter of student mobility and portability of grants and loans: Between Berlin and Bergen the Dutch government, for instance, organised a seminar with the title 'Designing policies for mobile students' where policy-makers and experts on student mobility in relation to grants and loans met for the first time internationally. To continue the exchange of information, the idea of an international network of grants and loans experts arose. Consequently, between December 2005 and April 2006, 11 Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) members drafted a proposal to establish a Bologna working group on portability of grants and loans, referring to the Bergen commitment of the Ministers to facilitate portability of grants and loans.² The BFUG approved the establishment of the group in April 2006. This working group examined the desire of countries to implement portable student financial support, the obstacles in doing so, and the different grants and loans systems in the Bologna area. The results of the work of this group were handed to the Ministers at their meeting in London in 2007. During the work of the group, it became clear that there are indeed obstacles to portability of grants and loans

¹ Bergen Communiqué, 2005 p.4

² Report of the working group portability of grants and loans to the BFUG 2007 (www.bologna2009benelux.org/documents/WGR2007/Portability_of_grants_and_loans_final_report2007.pdf)

and differences between the various student financial support systems. Upon advice of the working group³, the Ministers, in the London Communiqué, agreed to:

*'[...] set up a Network of national experts to share information, and help to identify and overcome obstacles to the portability of grants and loans.'*⁴

3. Work of the Expert Network – concrete actions

Establishment of the Network

The Network met for the first time in Lisbon on 2 October 2007. At the time, the following countries and organisations expressed interest in participating in the Network: Armenia, Austria, Belgium/French Community, Denmark, England, European Commission, ESU, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden, and Switzerland.

Some of these countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Ireland, Austria and the Netherlands) already offered grants and loans that could be taken along for studies abroad. These countries were interested in overcoming obstacles to data exchange between student financial support agencies. Members like Scotland, planning to make their grants and loans portable, wanted to learn from the experience of other countries. Network members like Lithuania (undergoing reforms of higher education including student support issues), Montenegro and Armenia were generally interested in the processes in other countries in view of possible future implementation.

It was agreed that the Network should be a Network of experts on student financial support, which is why the invited BFUG delegates were asked to bring a national expert in this field to the meeting. Having a Network consisting of experts should help to continue the work of the former working group on portability of grants and loans and to carry out the request of the Ministers to identify and address obstacles to the portability of grants and loans.

Scope of the Network

The scope of the Network is *all sorts of support for students that contribute to their mobility provided by the country of origin of the student.*

Combined chair

For the period of 2007-2009, the Network was jointly chaired by Scotland, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

³ Report of the working group on portability of grants and loans to the BFUG 2007

(www.bologna2009benelux.org/documents/WGR2007/Portability_of_grants_and_loans_final_report2007.pdf)

⁴ London Communiqué, 2007

Projects groups

The Network is a practically oriented, 'working' Network. To overcome obstacles to portability of student support and to assist countries in the implementation of portable support, two project groups were set up, one on information and one on data exchange.

Information on student support systems

The project group defined the most important data that experts on student financial support need for their everyday work. For this purpose, the project group produced a template (see annex A) with the aim of creating an information database on student support systems in all Bologna countries.

The templates were filled in by the following members involved in the project: Austria, Belgium/French Community, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Sweden. They were then posted on the BFUG website to allow members of the Network to use the information for their work concerning portability of grants and loans.

Data exchange between support-disbursing agencies

This project group aimed at facilitating data exchange on *individual students* between disbursing agencies to preclude that students receive grants or loans by both the home and the host country.

Germany and Austria suggested a pilot project focusing on three points: 1) a list of questions, 2) a menu of what information can be exchanged, 3) the number of students that received grants to study abroad. The group identified a need for three types of data: 1) date of birth, sex, name, 2) type of grant, 3) period of time, double grant etc. It soon turned out that the German and Austrian privacy laws did not allow the exchange of information about support being granted to (foreign) students, unless the specific case-to-case circumstances proved the stringent necessity to do so. Therefore, the envisaged pilot project between Austria and Germany could not be implemented.

The group however produced a template identifying the information a country needs to establish whether a student has a double grant, and a second template allowing countries to specify the circumstances under which data can be exchanged in compliance with data protection regulation (for the two templates see annex B).

Conference "Fostering student mobility: Next steps?"⁵

On 29-30 May 2008, a conference entitled "Fostering student mobility: Next steps?" was organised by the French Community of Belgium, with the support of Austria, Croatia, Spain, the Netherlands and ESU. The conference concentrated on the three themes of asymmetric mobility, attractiveness of the EHEA, and

⁵ The presentations, conclusions and recommendations of the seminar can be found at: www.bologna2009benelux.org/BolognaSeminars/Brussels2008.htm

portability of grants and loans. Four members of the Expert Network presented the situation concerning portability of grants and loans in their country and explained why their country is a member of the Expert Network:

Sweden	Have had portable grants and loans for a long time
The Netherlands	Just introduced portability of grants and loans
Scotland	Thinking about introducing portability of grants and loans
Georgia	Has only limited student financial support for students

A stakeholder from a higher education institution gave a presentation on EU law concerning the possibilities and problems with portability of grants and loans. A representative of the European Students' Union presented their perspective on the portability of grants and loans.

The conference was a good opportunity to promote the Network and to discuss problems like the lack of information on student mobility and financial support. One of the main areas highlighted, also in the conference conclusions, was the need for more consistent collection of data from countries on portability of student support as part of the wider BFUG data collection activities.

Cooperation with the BFUG working group on data collection

The Expert Network was also involved in the BFUG working group on data collection that had been set up to support Eurostat and Eurostudent in their efforts to develop comparable and reliable indicators to measure progress concerning the social dimension as well as student and staff mobility. The working group came to the conclusion that it was not possible to integrate a new indicator on the portability of grants and loans. For the Expert Network, the participation in the BFUG working group on data collection still was a good opportunity to make the Ministers aware of the need for better data on student and staff mobility and their social-economic background.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The Expert Network has started to work on important issues concerning the portability of grants and loans in the EHEA:

- a) It made available data on the portability of grants and loans of countries participating in the Network.
- b) It identified the conditions that need to be fulfilled to be able to exchange data on individual students between countries and produced a template that can be used for this purpose.

Next steps

In order to make the Expert Network fully functional, it needs a firm basis and more information on student financial support systems in the countries participating in the Bologna Process. The necessary firm basis could be provided by the Chairs of the Expert Network, a website where members or interested states can contact each other and work together, and an annual meeting of the Network to discuss the latest problems concerning the portability of grants and loans.

Website

In the first year of its existence, the work of the Expert Network was based on meetings of the Network and the Chairs and e-mail contact between the working groups. In the future, a website could help the Expert Network to work together more efficiently, providing information and the latest news on:

- Portable grants and loans in the member states of the Expert Network,
- Good practice between members,
- European Court of Justice cases,
- Contact details of colleagues in various countries who are responsible for the implementation of portable grants and loans.

Countries that are not members of the Expert Network yet could use the website to find out more about the work of the Network.

As a first step, full use should be made of the already existing Bologna website to make information available more publicly.

Annual meetings

The annual meetings of the Expert Network can serve various purposes:

- to provide networking possibilities for the members (to get to know each other)
- to inform each other about recent developments,
- to work together on problems or projects,
- to welcome new members to the Expert Network,
- to elect a new Chair.

Such annual meetings of the members of the Expert Network could also be combined with a seminar or conference for a wider public.

Chair

The Chair of the Expert Network should consist of two or three member states of the Expert Network and its functions should be:

- to monitor the content of the website,
- to represent the Expert Network,
- to organise the annual meetings of the Expert Network,
- to keep the members of the Network informed and to stimulate bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the members.

Data collection

For the work of the Expert Network, and for the execution of portable grants and loans, valid and comparable data about the student financial support systems of the Bologna member states are crucial. Therefore, the Network would like to encourage joint working across BFUG working groups, also involving Eurydice and others, to establish more consistent data collection on portability of student support in the EHEA. Similarly, the discussion should continue regarding the inclusion of more detailed questions (and indicators) about portability of grants and loans to the stocktaking. Finally, the Expert Network suggests that Ministers support new 'Bologna-wide' research on student mobility and the financial aspects of it.

Extending the Expert Network

To share information and to encourage more countries to introduce portable grants and loans, all countries participating in the Bologna Process are invited to join the Network.

Annex A: Template to gather information on student support systems in all Bologna countries

Contact Information

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and/or regional student finance agency or organization English version or summary information available 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student finance agency contact Information data exchange contact 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government department 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government student finance policy contact 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any other useful higher education websites 	

Financial Arrangements for Other EU Students Studying in your Country

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you a member of the EU? do you charge tuition fees for undergraduate higher education. fee support arrangements for EU students studying in your country fee support arrangements for non EU foreign nationals studying in your country 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you offer loans or grants for living costs to EU nationals studying in your country? If yes please describe support available. Do you offer loans or grants for living costs to EU nationals studying in your country? If yes please describe support available 	

Portable Grants and Loans

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you offer your own students grants or loans to study a full degree in another country (not ERASMUS etc.) 	
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Annex B:

Templates on data exchange between support-disbursing agencies

The information under point 1 to 7 has to be supplied by the country that is asking for the information. Points 8 to 15 will have to be filled in by the country that is being questioned.

Template data exchange

1.	Last name (maiden name, married name)?	
2.	First name(s)?	
3.	Sex?	It is debatable if this item is necessary. It could be argued it is necessary for determining if there could be a problem with item nr 1
4.	Date of birth?	
5.	Nationality?	
6.	National identifying number?	This field refers to an identifying number from the country that is asking for information.
7.	Over what period do you want to know if student support has been given financial support?	
8.	Does person have financial support for being enrolled in some form of higher education?	
9.	Does the financial support include support for cost of living? Please subdivide in amount (gift, loan, provisional loan).	
10.	Does the financial support include support for tuition fees? Please subdivide in amount and way of support (gift, loan, provisional loan).	
11.	What is the amount of financial support that has been granted over said period of time?	

Template data protection

	Questions	Clarification
	What is the name of your country?	
	Is your country a member of the EU?	
	Does your country have portable student support?	
	Does your country prohibit double student support? If your country prohibits double student support, please give the following data: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Since when is double student support prohibited?- Please provide a version of the official decision of the government relating to the prohibition of double student grants, preferably translated in English?	Personal data is collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a way incompatible with those purposes. This means that in relation to the prohibition of double student grants there has to be a law in place, a formal decision of the government that double student grants are

		prohibited. If not, there is no direct legitimate reason to access and collect data from other countries for these purposes. Another legitimate reason to get this information could be for example the fact that students aren't allowed to earn more than a specific amount of money alongside their student grant.
	If your country prohibits double student support, please specify under which conditions double student support is forbidden.	It is essential to give a description of how the ban on double student support has been shaped. There are several possibilities; In the Netherlands it is enough if someone gets 1 euro government support from another country. This leads to the retraction of the total amount of Dutch student support. Its possible that only the grant for support for cost of living leads to a retraction or when the total support is above a certain preset amount.
	Does your organisation, responsible for the execution of granting student support, have a central database with data concerning that support available?	
	Does your country provide in any data protection measures, dictated by law?	
	Under which circumstances can your country provide aforementioned data? There are several circumstances (as also mentioned in the data protection directive 95/46/EG):	In all likelihood each EU country will have chosen one or more of these six possibilities regarding the protection of student data. Non EU countries can describe their system next to the choice that matches their own system the best.
	(1) the data subject has unambiguously given his consent; or	
	(2) processing is necessary for the performance of a contract to which the data subject is party or in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract; or	

	(3) processing is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject; or	
	(4) processing is necessary in order to protect the vital interests of the data subject; or	
	(5) processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller or in a third party to whom the data are disclosed; or	
	(6) processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by the third party or parties to whom the data are disclosed, except where such interests are overridden by the interests for fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection under Article 1 of said directive.	
	Describe which technical measures have to be taken to satisfy the demands of your data protection laws regarding the actual exchange of data. For determining which class of data we speak of, see the first table.	Next to these legal organisational measures, data protection laws demand certain guarantees on the technical side of the actual exchange. Here the participating countries have to describe which minimal technical steps have to be taken before the actual data can be physically exchanged.