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1. INTRODUCTION

The Commission adopted on 18 January 2000 a Communication ‘Towards a European Research Area.’¹ The Communication deals with adequate human resources for the future needs of European research. Greater mobility of researchers, promoting a European dimension into scientific careers and making Europe attractive to researchers from the rest of the world are among the key elements for achieving this.

The European Research Area was taken up during the Lisbon European Council on 23-24 March 2000. The European Council asked the Council and the Commission, together with the Member States where appropriate, to take the necessary steps to remove obstacles to the mobility of researchers in Europe by 2002 and to attract and retain high-quality research talent in Europe.

The Research Council of 15 June 2000 adopted a resolution², in which it invited the Member States and the Commission to cooperate in order to identify and take action in view of removing present obstacles to the mobility of researchers to facilitate the creation of a genuine European scientific community.

Commissioner Busquin convened a group of nominated representatives from the Member States, the High-Level Expert Group on Improving Mobility of Researchers (HLG), to help prepare an analysis with a view to the Commission presenting proposals by June 2001. The work performed by the group is described in Annex 1.

2. OBSTACLES TO THE MOBILITY OF RESEARCHERS

The types of mobility discussed concerned on the one hand transnational mobility (movement between countries) and on the other hand intersectorial mobility (movement between industry and academia and between the private and the public sectors). Researchers in all fields of research, in both the public and the private sectors are concerned, and at all career stages (PhD student, junior, mid-career or senior researcher).

To improve the mobility, obstacles must be removed and adequate funding be available for mobility. It is important to note that the obstacles encountered by the researchers and their families depend very much on the duration of the stay (short-term of typically a few months to a year, medium-term of about 2-5 years or long-term) and the stage of the career of the researcher. There seems to be a concentration of obstacles for mid-career researchers in medium-term stays.

The objective of the work of the HLG has been to identify the main obstacles to mobility and to suggest ways of overcoming them, without pre-empting at which level action must be taken.

The obstacles are interdependent, but have for the sake of an efficient treatment been divided into four groups throughout the work of the HLG:

¹ COM (2000) 6 final.

² OJ C 205, 19.7.2000, p. 1.

1. legal and administrative obstacles to transnational mobility;
2. social, cultural and practical obstacles to transnational mobility;
3. obstacles to a European dimension in research careers;
4. obstacles to intersectorial mobility.

Detailed information about the specific situation in each Member State can be found in the synthesis document (Annex 2). The obstacles and good practice identified by the HLG are discussed below for each of the four groups separately.

2.1. General observations

There is a striking lack of comprehensive statistics about mobility of researchers in the majority of Member States, even in countries with advanced collection of information and nation-wide registers. This concerns both the mobility of incoming and of outgoing researchers. The information available is often dispersed and incomplete. For instance, labour force surveys are not helpful, as researchers are not identified as a distinct group. Complementary work is necessary in order to obtain the relevant statistics in order to identify with greater precision the existing difficulties at different stages of a researcher's career.

Many of the obstacles researchers face, in particular the legal and administrative obstacles, are not particular to them alone. It has been recognised that mobility is an essential element in the construction of the European Research Area, so any remaining general obstacles to mobility of workers and students affect researchers considerably.

Well-known excellent research groups, an up-to-date research infrastructure and adequate and efficiently managed research funding opportunities with the minimum necessary administrative requirements are regarded as essential elements in attracting and retaining researchers. Particular attention needs to be paid to the gender aspect. Women researchers often face more serious obstacles than men do, for instance related to maternity leave.

2.2. Legal and Administrative Obstacles to Transnational Mobility

2.2.1. Obstacles

Concerning legal and administrative issues, researchers are normally not treated differently from the rest of the labour force. The legal status of the researchers (employee, self-employed, civil servant, student) depends on the national legislation, with wide-ranging consequences as to their rights and obligations. For example, PhD students are in some countries considered mainly as employees, in others as students. The legal status of the researcher in the country of origin may also influence his or her status in the host country.

Third country researchers or third country family members of EU/EEA³ researchers face problems with visa, residence permit and work permit requirements. In addition to cumbersome and slow procedures, third country nationals often face immigration restrictions making it impossible for them to take up residence in the country for more than short stays or for employment. The most problematic cases are the researcher's third country family members wishing to take up employment in the host country. Sometimes, despite clear rules, researchers and their family members run into problems with local authorities not fully aware of all current regulations.

Third country researchers do not enjoy free movement as EU citizens do. This can pose problems for third country researchers, active in the EU, to travel to non-Schengen countries, for instance for scientific conferences or for the use of special research infrastructures.

Differences in the social security systems and levels of taxation in different Member States may make it unattractive to move from countries with a high level of social security benefits (for instance, a long maternity leave) or to countries with high taxation and social security contributions.

Mobile persons often have to pay contributions for benefits they cannot enjoy, nor receive compensation for. The Community regulations co-ordinating social security systems (Council Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 and its amendments) are very restrictive for transfer of unemployment benefits. This means that researchers are often obliged to pay for unemployment insurance, without having the actual possibility of benefiting from it. In some countries, civil servants have specific pension systems with restrictions that make it difficult to move out of the national civil service without loss. Furthermore, third country nationals, obliged to leave the country at the end of their planned stay, may lose their pension contributions, if there is no bilateral social security agreement covering the situation. Non-EU/EEA citizens are also not covered by current Community regulations co-ordinating social security systems.

Bilateral taxation agreements are missing with some relevant countries, in particular countries outside of the EU, introducing a risk of double taxation. There is also a risk of double taxation of pensions, due to national differences in taxation treatment of pension contributions and benefits. The national, and in some countries even local, variation in taxation treatment of PhD students and of fellowships may pose problems for the persons concerned.

In addition, differences can be seen between theory and practice, as even if the rules might appear clear, there can be problems in the interpretation of practical cases.

2.2.2. Good Practice Examples

Concerning entry regulations for researchers, France has a particular scientific visa procedure for third country researchers⁴, which is of interest to other Member States. Holders of scientific visa are exempt from work permits. Furthermore, a work permit is automatically issued for spouses. Germany has alleviated rules for work permits for

³ The European Economic Area (EEA) countries outside of EU are Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

⁴ For detailed information, see <http://www.cnrs.fr/fnak/sommvisa.html>

third country researchers funded within EU programmes. Finland has flexible administrative arrangements for researchers participating in research exchange programmes.

Germany, Ireland and the UK have special measures to facilitate the entry of skilled workers in current demand. An example is the German 'IT-specialists Temporary Relief Programme' with a quota of 10000 work permits to third country nationals. The UK has alleviated rules for researchers and research students wishing to remain in the UK.

Austria is moving towards a system where researchers in the public sector are no longer civil servants and are therefore not part of the specific civil service pension system.

Several Member States have reduced income taxation regimes for a limited period of time for foreign researchers or highly skilled specialists.

2.3. Social, Cultural and Practical Obstacles to Transnational Mobility

2.3.1. Obstacles

Information access is a problem for both researchers and administrators dealing with mobile researchers. This concerns both information about rules and regulations (local, national and EU-level) and information about opportunities for funding and vacancies. Generally, there are no one-stop information sources and co-ordination of the information at a national level is weak. There is much information on the Internet, but not all of it is correct or up-to date. The problem is to find the relevant and correct information. Vacancies are advertised in a variety of media (Internet, official journals, national and international press) but there is little information exchange and co-ordination among institutions at European level.

Mobile researchers not only face problems to access the information, but also often lack personal assistance with legal and practical problems. In general, the responsibility lies with the research institutions, some of which have international offices. Their usefulness, however, depends on the level of expertise among the administrators in charge. In most cases there are no specific nation-wide structures.

Lack of knowledge of the local language is a problem, particularly for less widely used languages. Even though a common language may be used with research colleagues, laboratory technicians and local authorities may not speak foreign languages. When language courses are provided, they may not be suitable for the needs of the researchers. Language problems can hamper the social integration and cause difficulties in the everyday life. This is especially serious for accompanying family members, in particular children. For the latter, there is the two-fold need to learn the new language and to have access to schooling in their mother tongue.

For researchers moving with their family, the partner's career, children's education or day-care, suitable accommodation and obligations remaining in the home country (such as rent or mortgage payments, or care of elderly parents) may all pose barriers

or problems for the mobility. These problems differ with the age of the researcher, length of the stay and the stage in the career. Only in a few Member States are accompanying family and the moving costs taken into account when funds are granted for research or teaching periods abroad. There is a problem for dual-career households, where the partner of the mobile researcher may be forced to interrupt his/her career. In most cases there are difficulties for the partner in obtaining leave of absence or to get a new job upon return to the home country. Likewise, in societies based on a double income, visiting researchers and their partners face the added dilemma of fitting the two career patterns. In most countries there are no provisions for the support of the partner's career.

Generally, when accommodation is available or subsidised for visiting researchers, it is only for short visits and for the researcher alone. For longer-term stays the degree of the problem is dictated by the housing market (costs and availability). Often, visitors cannot either benefit from special reduced fees (such as subsidised public transport or meals).

2.3.2. *Good Practice Examples*

In some countries, such as France⁵, the Netherlands⁶, Finland⁷ and the UK⁸, there are nation-wide integrated Internet sites on opportunities and regulations. In France, the Kastler Foundation⁹ provides personalised assistance to researchers from abroad.

Some countries provide easier access to fast-track language courses and, like Greece, provide language courses to the family. In Germany, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation¹⁰ and the German Academic Exchange Service¹¹ provide support for language courses before the start of the fellowships they finance. Likewise, in some countries, e.g. Luxembourg and Finland, special language and cultural support is offered to accompanying children both in the foreign and mother tongues.

In some countries, e.g. Finland, the researcher's family is taken into account when granting funding for stays abroad. Foreign researchers can benefit from reduced fees, subsidised accommodation and guesthouses mostly for short stays. In the new Greek programme for temporary employment of foreign researchers, moving costs for the family are also covered.

In Finland and Sweden, all children have the right by law to day-care.

⁵ See <http://www.francecontact.net>

⁶ See <http://www.academictransfer.nl>

⁷ See <http://www.cordis.lu/finland>

⁸ See <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk>, <http://www.britishcouncil.org>, <http://www.jobs.ac.uk> and <http://www.jobs.ac.uk>

⁹ See <http://www.cnrs.fr/fnak>

¹⁰ See <http://www.avh.de>

¹¹ Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD). See <http://www.daad.de>

2.4. Obstacles to a European Dimension in Research Careers

2.4.1. Obstacles

There is a danger of a shortage of young researchers in the future. A scientific career is not perceived as attractive.

Mobility can be one of the instruments to make a scientific career more effective. It is, however, not as attractive as it could be, as it is often viewed as a disadvantage for the researcher:

- Researchers who have been away from their national research system for some years have often difficulties to obtain a permanent or even temporary position upon return. Many researchers who have not yet secured a permanent position before leaving are hesitant about going abroad, as it could lead to a loss of already established links (research co-operation with professors and/or other colleagues) and being left 'out of the system'.
- For researchers with permanent positions, longer stays abroad may be a disadvantage for careers at home, if mobility is not recognised for seniority accreditation and/or career advancement. Also, the added intellectual value of a research period abroad is often insufficiently recognised.

Moreover, inadequate funding hampers mobility: too few positions or fellowships or too little research project funding. In particular, very little funding is available to specifically encourage mobility at mid-career and senior researcher levels. In countries with sabbaticals for academic researchers, there are often problems in financing replacements.

Age limits applied in some mobility schemes may considerably limit the possibilities for mobility, especially at later stages in the career and for women researchers who have been on maternity leave.

Researchers from outside the country, non-nationals as well as nationals, may have difficulties to compete with the researchers already in the country for research funding or positions, due to limited advertising, nationally or locally orientated decision procedures and/or excessively strict language requirements. Short submission periods for advertised vacancies may make it impossible for non-local researchers to apply, in particular if required diplomas must be officially translated or recognised before submission of application.

Recruitment and evaluation committees consisting of local researchers may easily prefer local candidates with whom they are familiar. In some cases, there are legal restrictions to foreign participation in recruitment and/or evaluation committees. Even when foreign scientists are participating in the evaluation, language restrictions for the applications may *de facto* exclude international experts from participating or candidates from applying.

Concerning recognition of diplomas, non-recognition is often based on the presumption that training obtained in another Member State is insufficient and that

further training has to be followed in the host Member State. In some cases, the authorities in the host Member State carry out fastidiously detailed examinations of the academic qualifications, consisting of a strict comparison of curricula. In certain Member States recognition of diplomas is not carried out by a central agency, but locally by the host institution.

2.4.2. *Good Practice Examples*

At the Community level and in the Member States, there are prolific numbers of transnational mobility schemes. Portugal has increased the number of mobility fellowships for incoming foreign researchers by 50% from 1994 to 1999. Finland, as an example, has bilateral research exchange schemes with many of the candidate countries.

In Denmark, it is recommended that half-a-year of the PhD studies should be carried out at research institutions abroad.

In some countries, for instance in Belgium, replacement costs for researchers on sabbaticals are covered.

To be appointed as university professors in Austria or in the Netherlands, scientists have to demonstrate that they have had international research experience.

Research periods abroad are by law or *de facto* taken into account in Spain, France and Portugal at recruitment and for seniority accreditation.

Though not always a requirement, it is common practise in many Member States to publish research vacancies internationally.

In the United Kingdom, open recruitment is common practice with some schemes supporting the costs of recruiting outstanding researchers from industry or overseas. Almost 50% of Luxembourg's national research grants are allocated to non-nationals.

In some research funding organisations in Member States (e.g. Portugal, Finland, Sweden), foreign participation in recruitment and/or evaluation committees is compulsory or facilitated by requiring applications to be written in a 'world' language.

A method, used in a Greek research institute, to integrate foreign scientists into the local research environment is to encourage their participation in the decision making of the host institution.

In certain countries, foreign researchers recruited to a university may have transition periods, during which they may teach in a foreign language, before being obliged to teach in the local language.

A new initiative has been taken by the Dutch research council (NWO) to stimulate the development of research careers. This includes measures for mid-career researchers to establish their own research groups.

2.5. Obstacles to Intersectorial Mobility

2.5.1. Obstacles

Encouraging links between industry and academia is widely supported as an effective mechanism for addressing some of the current pressures experienced in both sectors. The capacity of industry to react effectively to rapid changes in technology, the continuous trend towards outsourcing research activity and to access knowledge and services demanded by globalisation is enhanced by improved links with academia. Similarly, increased awareness of where knowledge services can be sold to commercial enterprises and opportunities amongst academic researchers for innovation and start-ups have enhanced the links from academia to industry.

Mobility of researchers between the sectors is widely perceived as an effective mechanism for encouraging these links. The relatively low proportion of researchers employed in the commercial sector relative to the USA and Japan demands more efficient links.

The barriers to intersectorial mobility reported by Member States in the HLG were not limited to the administrative and legal issues reported earlier under transnational mobility, but also extended to the lack of understanding of the nature of the other sector. Conflicts such as publication versus confidentiality, or best science versus product development were widely reported as obstacles whether real or perceived. The wide range of obstacles was an indication of the importance that some Member States assigned to intersectorial mobility. The HLG, however, noted that these types of issues are under discussion on other forums. Therefore, the HLG has not studied in full depth the obstacles to intersectorial mobility.

In some Member States formal requirements for qualifications exist for academic positions, making it difficult for industrial researchers to move to academia. There is a variation according to scientific discipline: certain industrial experience is accepted instead of formal academic qualifications especially in engineering sciences.

Most countries endorse simultaneous employment in both sectors but some apply time or salary restrictions. The extent to which academics must declare their commercial activities to academic establishments also varies from one Member State to another.

Transfer of pensions and social security rights is problematic in some countries. Entitlements built up over several years in the public sector can be lost or not readily re-established after an extended period in industry. The civil service status of researchers was for some countries reported to be a disincentive to intersectorial mobility.

Financial support for start-ups and spin-offs varies widely from one Member State to another.

Intellectual and industrial property rights (IPR) are widely perceived as a complex issue and a potential barrier. It is acknowledged that this is an important issue, which is being addressed elsewhere.

Difference in salary level is often perceived as a barrier to go to the public sector. Also the fear of loss of researchers to the private sector is a disincentive for fostering links between academia and industry, particularly in areas of rapid growth (e.g. information technology).

2.5.2. *Good Practice Examples*

In all Member States, there are schemes to promote intersectorial mobility and training in industry, and more generally, schemes to encourage intersectorial co-operation.

In academia there are associate positions for researchers from industry. In Italy, academic researchers can be seconded to industry at low costs to the industry and with financial support from the ministry to replace such researchers. In Spain and Finland there are special programmes to stimulate temporary mobility from academia to industry, for researchers at all levels of career.

The French law on innovation and research of 1999 provides a range of measures to facilitate mobility from academia to industry, including a possibility to create or to be associated to the creation of a spin-off company exploiting the research, without losing the status of civil servant for up to six years, and taxation relief for companies employing young PhDs. In Spain, the taxation advantages for industry when working in RTD has had a positive impact on the development of new companies linked to universities.

In the UK, several measures are set out in the Science and Innovation White Paper¹² to strengthen the interface between academia and industry.

Specific training modules for communications skills or industrial awareness are being developed in many countries.

Some countries have developed significant opportunities at the national level for start-ups and spin-offs. For instance, in the Netherlands a large programme has been created in the area of life sciences.

In France, there is an IPR charter.

3. SUGGESTED ACTIONS

On the basis of the contributions of different Member States and following the discussion in the HLG, it is clear that all groups of obstacles identified have a significant impact on the mobility of researchers. The HLG agreed to place the main emphasis on the first three groups of obstacles discussed above (legal and administrative; social, cultural and practical; European dimension in research careers), though there were differing views as to the priority which should be attached to each. Less emphasis was given to the fourth group of obstacles (intersectorial mobility).

¹² UK Department of Trade and Industry, 'Excellence and Opportunity: a science and innovation policy for the 21st century,' HMSO, Cm 4814 (2000).

Actions and proposals to rectify the situation must be taken at different levels (Community, national, local etc.) and through different instruments (legislative, administrative etc.). Moreover, timing for decision making processes can vary in function of the instruments that are necessary. The HLG preferred to concentrate its analysis on short-term pragmatic measures without denying that other actions must be taken.

3.1. Information and Assistance

Information coordination: In the HLG, there was widespread support for better co-ordination of the information to mobile researchers through an Internet portal, but not in the form of a centralised database of vacancies. Such a portal would provide access to both national and Community-level sources of information. This information would be on legal, administrative and cultural conditions in different countries and regulations related to mobility, such as bilateral tax and social security agreements, as well as on mobility opportunities, such as mobility programmes and vacancies for researchers. The information on vacancies should ideally also cover descriptions of the research environment, including the research team. This information should be built up gradually, building on existing structures in many Member States.

Customised assistance: Efforts to make information about mobility more readily available to researchers should be combined with customised assistance to researchers from specialised institution(s), already existing ones or new structures, in each country. This customised assistance would help maintain contacts with the researchers after they have left the country. Networking and close connections between laboratories is paramount for developing successful mobility. It is normally beneficial, if a postdoctoral researcher chooses a host laboratory with already established close connections with the home laboratory. It is also important that he or she keeps strong connections to the home organisation.

Reception of foreign researchers: A quality charter / code of conduct for the reception of foreign researchers could be defined. In order to improve the reception in individual research institutions, the relevant officials should be given training about Community and national law pertinent to mobile researchers.

3.2. Networking Activities

Good practice workshops: A Belgian proposal to arrange workshops for exchange of national good practice was widely supported in the HLG. An example of a possible topic is the French scientific visa, which attracted much interest in the HLG. Such workshops should take place on a regular basis.

Studies and practical cases: More work should be undertaken on the legal obstacles to mobility, including the candidate countries in the exercise. The results of existing and recent studies undertaken in the Member States should be made more widely available and compared. In order to gain a better picture of the true difficulties for

mobile researchers (the difference between theory and practice), Belgium suggested that a set of genuine practical cases be examined in detail.

Coordination: There is a need for internal coordination within the Member States and within the Commission to solve the problems. A constant dialogue at all levels is necessary in order to raise the visibility of the existing problems for mobile researchers. The work initiated by the HLG could continue through networking among the Member States. There could be regular progress reports on the removal of obstacles.

3.3. Additional Initiatives

Financial incentives: Further development of financial incentives for mobility, including return grants, both at national and Community level, was suggested. In this respect, attention should be paid to building with the different parties a coherent pattern of funding opportunities, with due respect to the different levels of decision.

Language support: There was agreement on the need to favour plurilinguism, with emphasis on less widely used languages, by increasing the availability and support of language training for researchers and their families.

Family and gender issues: Measures should also be considered to minimise the problems of mobility on dual career households in the cases of medium- to long-term mobility, which especially affects women researchers at mid-career level. If the family is not accompanying the researcher, such measures could include more flexible work arrangements. More information is needed on the impact of maternity on the attraction of fellowships for researchers who are, or will be, parents. Special measures are needed for the day-care and education of the children.

Accreditation: Successful mobility periods should be considered at least as a favourable element for progress in research careers in public research institutions. It would be important to have a more straightforward recognition of diplomas, in particular PhD degrees.

Social security and taxation: The HLG also hoped for advancements in the coordination of social security¹³ and taxation. Some Member States stressed that taxation and social security lie within the competence of Member States. It was recognised that these aspects would require high political level agreement.

Industry and academia: The HLG would like to see a further development of the interaction between industry and academia. There was widespread support for making it easier for established employees, particularly those with long experience, to move between the public and the private sectors.

¹³ For example, the HLG noted the Commission proposal for a new regulation on the coordination of social security systems (OJ C 38, 12.2.1999, p. 10) and a Commission Communication is foreseen on the taxation of occupational pensions.

Statistics: The HLG agreed on the need to improve the collection of statistics on mobile researchers.

It should be noted that many of the actions of the Mobility Action Plan, mentioned in Annex 1, are also relevant for researchers.

Work Performed by the High Level Group

The work undertaken in the HLG built on preparatory work by the Commission services¹. It also took into account previous work, such as:

- the Green Paper on Obstacles to Transnational Mobility², covering people in education, training and research (1996),
- the report of the High Level Panel on the free movement of persons chaired by Mrs Simone Veil³, in which several obstacles to mobility were identified and a number of actions suggested (1997).

The HLG also benefited from connections with other directorate-generals of the Commission and with other Community actions related to mobility, most notably:

- the Mobility Action Plan⁴ initiated by the French Presidency and the Commission Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers⁵. The recommendation is still under discussion in Parliament and Council,
- the *ad hoc* Mobility Group on free movement within the public service established by the Directors-General for public administration. A report on legal obstacles to mobility was submitted for the Directors-General's meeting of 9-10 November 2000.

The HLG met for its first meeting on 16 October 2000 and agreed to identify obstacles to mobility of researchers using a questionnaire that would be prepared by the Commission. This questionnaire comprising 16 detailed questions was sent to the HLG on 30 October for replies by 17 November.

The second HLG meeting took place 27-28 November 2000 to discuss the responses. Also representatives of other directorate-generals were present in the meeting in order to ensure exchange of information and co-ordination. The meeting agreed that the Commission would produce a draft synthesis document on the basis of the written contributions and the discussion in the meeting. This draft synthesis document was sent to the HLG on 4 December. Thereafter, the Member States were asked to verify and complete the information by 14 December.

In a letter to the HLG on 19 December 2000 accompanying an updated version of the synthesis document, the Member States were asked by 15 January 2001 to:

- prioritise the different obstacles (ranking of the major obstacles to mobility, with respect to their importance, on the one hand, for researchers coming to their country and, on the other hand, for researchers from their own country wishing to undertake mobility periods abroad),

¹ In the preparatory work for the HLG, the Commission made use of experts working in personal capacity. The Commission services met with such experts in July and September 2000 to discuss (i) obstacles to transnational mobility, (ii) mobility between industry and academia and (iii) research careers.

² COM (1996) 462 final.

³ The high level panel report, as well as other information on the free movement of persons is available on the Internet at http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/people/index.htm.

⁴ OJ C 371, 23.12.2000, p. 4.

⁵ COM (1999) 708 final. Modified proposal COM (2000) 723 final.

- identify good practice (examples of what the HLG members consider to be good practice in their own country and in other Member States, indicating the feasibility of adapting/adopting these in their own country),
- suggest possible improvements for the mobility of researchers (further ideas for improvements to the current mobility situation, indicating respectively actors responsible (Commission, Member States, regional and local authorities, universities etc.) and giving estimates of the time frame necessary for their implementation).

A final draft of the synthesis document was sent to the HLG on 22 January 2001. In the third meeting on 2 February 2001, the three topics of the 19 December letter were discussed. It was agreed that the HLG would produce a report.

A preliminary draft version of the report was sent to the HLG on 24 February 2001. The fourth HLG meeting took place on 13 March 2001, after which a revised draft was circulated and the final version was approved on 4 April 2001. Attached to this report is the final synthesis document (Annex 2).