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Barents Cross-Border University meeting Rovaniemi 13th to 14th March, 2008

The Barents Cross-Border University (BCBU) meeting on March 13th began with parallel Master's programme workgroup meetings followed by a joint meeting of all programmes. During the workgroup meetings various planning issues were discussed, and in the joint meeting a list of questions on issues of programme implementation was produced for the Rectors to address during the Rectors' meeting. In addition, towards the end of the day, a Finnish-Russian joint steering group meeting of master's programmes (Comparative Social Work and Barents Environmental Engineering) was held, during which discussions evolved around the results of the previous year and the planned activities for 2008.

On the second day of meetings, in addition to the Rectors' speeches, Special Government Advisor, Ilkka Turunen from the Finnish Ministry of Education, gave a presentation on the internationalisation and the significance of cross-border universities from a Finnish perspective. Following this, the Rectors introduced the current situation of implementing the Master's programmes, and they provided many answers to the list of questions submitted to them. For example, issues such as added value of Master's programmes; the form of degrees offered; quality assurance audit; distance learning benefits and students' selection criteria all have to meet national prerequisites and solutions will depend greatly on the legislation and rules within each country. On the other hand, some points were rather clear concerning financing and funding instruments, scholarships, quotas and tuition fees. For example Finnish partners will apply mobility grants for teachers and students through FIRST. In this respect, important matters concerning fees are to be considered, since with FIRST agreements it is stated that there are to be no tuition fees between partners. Additionally, approval of curricula, agreements concerning the implementation of the Master's programmes as well as a common marketing strategy will demand some work during the spring and autumn. All the universities will continue to work to solve open issues for the common aim to implement the Master's programmes.

The meeting continued with the leaders of the Master's programmes presenting the state of their Master's programmes. One important point concerning all of them was that a joint application, which shows a BCBU context of Master's programmes as well as individual applications of each Masters' programmes have been sent to the Finnish Ministry of Education in Mid February 2008. The names of the programmes were made more specific for those applications, which are now as follows: Master's Degree Programme in Comparative Social Work; Master's Degree Programme in Health and Wellbeing in the Circumpolar Area; Barents Master's Degree Programme in Environmental Engineering; and Master's Degree Programme in Software and Systems Development in Global Environment.

At the end of the meetings, Rector Irina Lugovskaya from Pomor State University invited the BCBU partners to Archangelsk for the next meeting, which is to be held on October 13th 2008.