

The Bologna Process: where are we now?

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Progress

- Reviewed every two years at the Bologna Ministerial Conference
- Based on information from such sources as:
 - European University Association (EUA) and European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)
 - European Students' Union (ESU)
 - National “stocktaking” reports: include “score card” indicating progress in ten key areas related to the Bologna “action lines”; indicators for the 2009 exercise designed to verify if the original goals (expected to be reached by 2010) are being achieved
- Analysed and evaluated by Bologna Follow-Up Group : BFUG also oversees programme of work and official events between summits

Scottish Score Card

Implementation of degree system

1. Stage of implementation of the first and second cycle	5
2. Access to the next cycle	5
3. Implementation of national qualifications framework	5

National implementation of *Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA*

4. Stage of development of external quality assurance system	5
5. Level of student participation in quality assurance	5
6. Level of international participation in quality assurance	5

Recognition

7. Stage of implementation of diploma supplement	5
8. National implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention	5
9. Stage of implementation of ECTS	5
10. Recognition of prior learning	5

Analysis of 2009 national reports

- Full *implementation of the first and second cycles* only a matter of time; but in some countries the actual proportion of students studying in the Bologna system is still low
- When it comes to *access to the next cycle* the picture looks very “green”; but in some countries graduates have to meet additional admission requirements
- Original deadline of 2010 for countries to have completed *implementation of National Qualification Frameworks for Higher Education* now appears over-ambitious
- Requirement to have a fully functioning national *external quality assurance system* that applies to all HE and to have completed or set a date for peer review of national QA agency has moved some countries from “green” to “yellow”
- Overall level of *student participation in quality assurance* has increased; but there are still some serious gaps
- Some countries are not yet meeting requirement for *international participation in quality assurance* review teams and membership of an international QA network
- Some countries are still failing to issue the *Diploma Supplement* to all graduates or to issue it automatically
- There is a long way to go before there is a coherent approach to *recognition of qualifications* within the EHEA
- Requirement that *ECTS credits* must be demonstrably linked with learning outcomes is not yet being met by some countries
- There is still little or no *recognition of learning* undertaken outside the formal education system

Key achievements

- 46 countries working together to create the EHEA: *“No other initiative has mobilized so many people, apart from the creation and development of the EU in 1957”* (BFUG).
- Evidence that the implementation of the Bologna Process is making European HE more attractive and competitive on a global scale
- Structural reforms, reference points and technical instruments have increased the transparency and compatibility of European HE; made it easier for academics to understand, value and recognise courses and qualifications obtained elsewhere; and removed one of the barriers to student and graduate mobility
- Collaboration between institutions in different countries, particularly in the design and delivery of joint masters programmes: facilitated by the **Erasmus Mundus** scheme (100+ programmes, 2000 graduate students and 450 teaching staff from outside Europe in 2008-09)

Key challenges: uneven progress

Not all countries are progressing at the same rate:

- *“Differences exist between countries, between institutions as well as between disciplines” (BFUG)*
- *“Progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go”*
- *“Tendency towards an ‘a la carte’ approach to implementation in some countries”*
- *“The student experience on the ground has not changed and is often failing to match the progress highlighted on paper at high-level meetings” (ESU)*

Key challenges: student resistance

- Emergence of student resistance to Bologna reforms in Spain, Greece, France, Italy and Croatia: object to “*Anglo-Saxonisation*” of European HE and the threat to national diversity
- ESU seeking greater student involvement in Bologna Process and to ensure that students’ social concerns are addressed

Key challenges: completion

- Completion of existing Bologna action lines relating to introduction of new degree structure, qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition
- Rooting Bologna reforms in *“the European values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and active participation of students and staff”*

Key challenges: three cycle system

- Ensuring that the introduction of three cycle system involves more than just re-labelling the components of the former single cycle diploma programmes
- Ensuring that it is accompanied by more substantial pedagogic changes that reflect the shift to **student-centred learning**, which some believe is likely to be the most significant legacy of the Bologna Process

Key challenges: learning outcomes

- More work needed to improve understanding of the concept and its use in design and delivery of curricula
- Generic descriptors based on learning outcomes defined for each of the cycles in the overarching *Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA*
- Development of subject-specific descriptors as part of the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project: reference points for design and delivery of degree programmes in Chemistry, European Studies, Occupational Therapy and Physics

[<http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>]

Key challenges: quality assurance

- Support for development of robust national and institutional quality assurance systems: creates climate of trust and confidence - prerequisite for mutual recognition of qualifications
- EUA Quality Culture project (2002-06): 134 HEIs working together to identify how an internal quality culture can be developed and embedded
- QAHECA project (2008-09): HE Academy, EUA and 30 HEIs and QA agencies looking at how to make QA processes less bureaucratic and ensure that they don't stifle creativity and innovation

Key challenges: social dimension

- Three reasons:
 1. Demographic: supporting an ageing population with a shrinking workforce
 2. Economic: need to widen the pool of those with access to higher education if EU is to become *"the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world"* (Lisbon Strategy, 2000)
 3. Social justice: advantages of higher education should be available to all who have the potential to benefit from it
- Encouragement to develop lifelong learning strategies and partnerships to widen participation through creation of more flexible learning paths and opportunities for work-based learning
- Aim for *"the student body in higher education to reflect the diversity of Europe's populations"*

Key challenges: external dimension

- Aims to provide information specifically targeted at countries outside the EHEA and to co-ordinate information visits to and from these countries
- **Bologna Policy Forum** to be held within the framework of the Bologna Ministerial Conference for participants from EHEA countries and those whose countries have expressed an interest in the Process but are not eligible for membership (University of Louvain-la-Neuve, 29 April 2009)

Key challenges: mobility

- *“Progress in this area does not seem to match the initial expectations”* (BFUG)
- Introduction of shorter first degrees may have made it more difficult to integrate a study period abroad
- Concerted effort to develop mobility policies and practical measures to deliver *“more mobility of a higher quality”*, *“a more balanced flow of incoming and outgoing students”* and *“a better participation rate from the diverse student body”*
- HEIs to be encouraged to create “mobility windows”, develop joint degree programmes with institutions in other countries and make mobility an important ingredient in the training of research students
- Students to be encouraged to be mobile between first and second cycles
- Better data collection to monitor outcomes and measure progress
- Aim for mobility to be *“considered the rule”* rather than the exception.

Key challenges: employability

- First two action lines aimed to “*promote European citizens’ employability*” and specified that first cycle degree “*should be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification*”
- But, it is proving difficult to get employers to understand and accept that graduates from the new bachelor programmes are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed by the labour market
- New bachelor degree still has a long way to go before it is accepted as an entrance qualification to higher level careers
- View persists that first cycle graduates haven’t really finished their studies and that those wishing to take the higher career path should acquire a master’s qualification, either immediately after their first degree or after a period of work experience

Key challenges: employability (cont)

Some solutions:

- More systematic HEI/employer dialogue to convince employers that first cycle graduates have the knowledge, skills and attributes that the labour market needs
- Involvement of employers in the design (and possibly the delivery) of first cycle degree programmes
- Learning outcomes can help employers to understand what they can expect a graduate of a particular study programme to know, understand and be able to do

Points to ponder...

- The Bologna Process *"has sufficient momentum to become the dominant global model of higher education within two decades"* (Higher Education Policy Institute, July 2008)
- *"The EHEA's 4,000 institutions and 16 million students make it similar in size and scope to the US system and will give it a major competitive advantage in the fight for foreign students"* (Times Education Supplement, October 2008)

Three useful websites

- Universities UK Europe Unit

http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/sites/europe_unit2/bologna_process/index.cfm

- JISC InfoNet

<http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bologna-process>

- Official Bologna Website 2007-2009

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>