

Furthering the Bologna Process

Report to the Ministers of Education of the signatory countries

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Report commissioned by the Follow-up group of the Bologna Process

Executive Summary

The follow-up group of the Bologna Process commissioned the rapporteur to present this report as a contribution to the meeting in Prague, in May 2001, of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education of the countries that signed the Bologna Declaration in June 1999. The report gives a short overview of the follow-up, reviews succinctly the developments since Bologna and dwells on scenarios for the future.

The organisation of the process was decided by the EU Ministers in September 1999 and a work programme was established by the follow-up group in November 1999. This work programme has included international seminars on three topics ("Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems", "Bachelor-Level Degrees" and "Transnational Education") and the Convention of European Higher Education Institutions, all leading to the preparation of the Prague Conference. ESIB organised a Student Convention to create input to this meeting.

A move towards a "bachelor"/"master" structure is continuing, both in countries where it started earlier, but also in new ones, with examples in all disciplines. However, some professionally oriented degrees remain long and leading directly to a "master".

Mobility and the instruments of recognition and transparency of qualifications (ECTS, Diploma Supplement and Lisboa Recognition Convention) are receiving unanimous support. Awareness of the employability issue is raising and more degrees with a clear professional orientation are being implemented. Competitiveness is rated highly, but awareness of transnational education challenges still seems to be low and lifelong learning is a priority only in a limited number of countries.

The introduction of ECTS-compatible credit systems is spreading and the acceptance of ECTS units as a basis for a European credit system is increasing. A subject-related approach to identify common learning outcomes was identified as necessary to overcome difficulties concerning both credits and degree structures.

More countries are creating or willing to create quality assurance systems and accreditation is on national and international agendas, at least as a topic for discussion.

With the aim of building the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Declaration indicates three main goals (international competitiveness, mobility and employability), and six instrumental objectives. However, higher education has broader aims of the social, cultural and human development and the European Higher Education Area will also be the result of shared values and a common social and cultural heritage.

A number of factors contributing towards the goals may be identified. Among these factors are the readability of degrees, acceptance and recognition of qualifications and periods of study, clear information on objectives and learning outcomes, as well as relevance of the programmes, quality assurance and accreditation, dissemination of European knowledge, friendly student services, visa policies and support for mobility.

The main goals and the specific objectives of the Bologna Declaration have received wide acceptance and reforms are under way, both at national and institutional level. However, some issues require clarification, others may be pushed forward and some just need monitoring. Social issues were raised, namely by students, and issues like lifelong learning and transnational education are gaining renewed or new visibility.

A question, which is becoming more apparent as the process progresses, is that of which values and concepts, concerning higher education, are common or to what extent are they shared among the signatory countries. A study on the values,

concepts and terminology would facilitate discussions and communication in the future.

The development of a comprehensive credit system, allowing for accumulation, has proven difficult, although a consensus has grown around basing it on ECTS units. Generalising the use of ECTS units and adopting ECTS compatible national systems is a step forward. National degree structures are converging, but difficulties have been identified in some subject areas. Both difficulties, concerning credits and degree structures, suggest that further work by subject area at European level is required and could lead to identify relevant reference levels, expressed as learning outcomes (including knowledge, competencies and skills). Common reference levels will also facilitate the development of joint degrees, involving institutions from two or more signatory countries.

The development of national quality assurance systems, besides pursuing national objectives, should aim at building mutual trust in the European Higher Education Area and world-wide through European co-operation. The discussions on accreditation suffered from differences in concept and approach, requiring further clarification before any concrete agreement on future action may be reached.

Instruments for recognition, either academic or professional, and transparency, such as the Lisboa Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement already exist, just requiring being fully developed and/or generalised. Although recognition is essential for mobility, there are still other obstacles. The Mobility Action Plan endorsed by the European Council is a useful reference for future action.

Lifelong learning has been on the international agenda for some time and there are some experiences. The development of national policies could benefit from sharing experiences and good practices and, besides raising the levels of education and employability, may improve attractiveness of European higher education.

Transnational education is growing and challenging traditional education. Policies geared towards transparency and quality of qualifications should contemplate the transnational offer. On the other hand, the signatory countries may adopt a pro-active approach by offering programmes outside the European Higher Education Area and joint efforts to this effect could be promoted.

To establish the European Higher Education Area, easily accessible information on programmes and institutions, including the conditions offered to students, is essential and can be done using ICT. This information should be available in a form that is relevant for candidates and students, but also for employers and society at large.

Attractiveness of higher education institutions, besides ensuring quality and relevance, require that institutions are aware and respond to the diversity of needs of candidates and students. Such needs are different depending on the student being national or foreign, young or mature, graduate or post-graduate, etc.

To monitor the progress of the European Higher Education Area as a whole, as a basis for future decisions for the Bologna Process, data collected in the various signatory countries should be comparable. If the decision is taken to collect such comparable data, a technical study is required. Besides data, background studies will be needed to prepare future discussions and to support decisions.

The Bologna Process has been conducted on a rather informal basis. This has certain advantages but is also a fragile arrangement, with some risks to the memory of the process. The organisation and mandate of the follow-up structure for the future should, in consequence, be considered.

Furthering the Bologna Process

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INTRODUCTION

1. The present report was prepared as a contribution for the meeting of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Prague on the 18th and 19th of May 2001. The follow-up group decided that, besides the contributions coming from the stakeholders and the outcomes of the seminars and meetings, a specific report should be prepared for the Ministers of Education and commissioned the rapporteur to present this report¹.

2. The report includes, besides the Introduction, two parts. The first one, Developments since Bologna, aims at giving a succinct overview of the trends that may be observed in the European higher education systems, of the outcomes of the events organised in the framework of the Bologna Process and of the issues involved in the main goals of the Bologna Declaration. The second part, Scenarios for the future, analyses the main issues that have been discussed and makes suggestions on directions for future action. These suggestions, although discussed in the follow-up, are the responsibility of the rapporteur.

The steering and enlarged follow-up groups

3. To ensure that the work, necessary to achieve the objectives set by the Bologna Declaration, was done, the European Union's Ministers, assembled in Tampere in September 1999, decided to establish two groups. These are the steering (or restricted) and the enlarged follow-up groups. The enlarged group is composed of the representatives of the 29 signatory countries, the European Commission, the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE)². This group met for the first time in Helsinki, on the 16th November 1999, under Finnish Presidency, and defined a draft programme of events. These events, their themes and outcomes are described below.

4. The steering group is composed of representatives of the EU enlarged troika countries (the Presidency, the previous and the two successive presidencies), the Czech Republic, the European Commission, the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE). This group met for the first time in Lisbon, on the 31st of January 2000, under Portuguese Presidency.

5. The mandate of these groups did not explicitly include accepting other countries or organisations as part of the enlarged follow-up group. Nevertheless, it was the understanding of the groups that it would fall under the mandate of the enlarged group to accept the participation of other organisations as observers. In 2000, the Council of Europe, a Student Platform and EURASHE were added, as observers, to the enlarged group. Any other decisions concerning the participation in the follow-up groups will have to be taken by the Ministers in Prague. If the procedure adopted by the

¹ In preparing the report, the rapporteur was supported by a European Commission grant through the Portuguese NARIC, that made possible his presence at the international seminars and at the Convention of the European Higher Education Institutions, included in programme between Bologna and Prague.

² The Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities have merged, originating the European University Association.

follow-up groups is to be revised, an appropriate mandate from the Ministers is required.

The work programme

6. The work programme agreed in Helsinki included, besides the Prague Conference, three international seminars. The first one was held in Leiria, Portugal, in November 2000, on the issue of "Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems". The second one was held in Helsinki, Finland, in February 2001, on "Bachelor-Level Degrees". And the third one was held in Malmö, Sweden, in March 2001, and was on "Transnational Education".

7. The steering group agreed that, unlike the Bologna Conference academic day, the meeting of the academic institutions should be held in advance of the Ministers' conference. In this way, the discussions of the academic institutions could be taken into consideration by the Ministers and, therefore, have an impact on the outcomes of the Prague Conference. The CRE and Confederation offered to jointly organise what became the Convention of European Higher Education Institutions, held in Salamanca, Spain, at the end of March 2001. This convention was also the opportunity for the formal constitution of the European University Association, a merger of the two organisations.

8. Numerous other seminars and conferences, international or national, have taken place in the time mediating from Bologna to Prague. Specific reference to all these events is not possible in a short report, as this one has to be. However, the large number of events related to the Bologna Declaration and those where it has been specifically mentioned, is the best indicator of its impact on European higher education.

I. DEVELOPMENTS SINCE BOLOGNA

I.1 The trends³

9. This section aims at giving a very succinct overview of the developments since Bologna, in June 1999. The Trends II report⁴ will give a fuller account of such developments. Some of the developments that are mentioned would have taken place anyway, others are a direct result of the Bologna Declaration, but one may say that most have, to some extent, been influenced by its objectives. The general goals, competitiveness of the European higher education system, mobility and employability, are common concerns of governments and institutions alike. The six objectives, established in Bologna for the first decade of this century, have received a wider acceptance from the academic community than was possible to anticipate in June 1999. But differences in understanding of the Bologna Declaration and, especially, what it implies for the future, are still significant.

10. The adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, graduate and post-graduate, is one of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration for which a consensus proved more difficult to reach. Nevertheless, the move

³ For the preparation of this section, the rapporteur was given access to the responses to the questionnaire and analyses elaborated by the team preparing the "Trends II" report.

⁴ HAUG, Guy; TAUCH, Christian; "Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education (II)", April 2001.

towards a “bachelor”/“master”⁵ structure has continued, both in countries where it had started earlier, but also in new ones. There are examples of such a structure in all disciplines, although few in medicine. There is a significant trend to the introduction of three year “bachelor” programmes, but there are many examples of four year programmes. There is a trend towards professionally oriented “bachelor” degrees, in spite of some being considered as intermediate qualifications and as a platform for options in terms of further study. At the same time, in several countries, certain professionally oriented degrees remain organised as long, one-tier programmes, leading directly to a “master” degree.

11. The objective relating to the degree structure, is the one objective that has proved more controversial, involving governments and higher education institutions, as well as professional associations, and has given way to the greatest diversity of interpretations.

12. Mobility is receiving unanimous support, including a strong support for the instruments of recognition and transparency of qualifications, such as ECTS, the Diploma Supplement and the Lisboa Recognition Convention.

13. Awareness of the employability issue is rising, although a difference in emphasis may depend on the type of institution, wherever different types exist, and the understanding that being “relevant to the European labour market” does not have to imply that programmes are geared towards a specific professional occupation. But new “bachelors” and “masters” with a clear professional orientation are being implemented.

14. Competitiveness, mainly understood as attractiveness, of the higher education systems is rated highly, although only a limited number of countries have comprehensive plans. On the other hand, awareness of the challenges raised by transnational education still seems to be low.

15. Lifelong learning is far from being generally identified as an integral part of higher education and is a priority only in a limited number of countries.

16. The introduction of ECTS, or of ECTS-compatible credit systems, is spreading. The understanding that the introduction of such credit systems does not compel the institutions to recognise all imported credits, nor that it is a threat to curriculum coherence, is also growing, contributing to their acceptance.

17. The need for a subject-related approach, in what concerns the identification of relevant reference levels in terms of learning outcomes across Europe, has emerged as an issue. It is viewed as enabling greater co-operation and comparability and a way of overcoming some of the difficulties that have been found in a general approach, for instance in what concerns credits and degree structures.

18. Quality assurance is moving forward, with more countries creating or willing to create new quality assurance systems and agencies, as well as, at international level, with the creation of ENQA. There seems to be a move

⁵ The term “bachelor” will be used for simplicity, standing for first degrees of a curricular duration of 3 to 4 years, whatever the specific name used in each country. Identically for the term “master”, although it was already used in the Bologna Declaration.

towards the introduction of national accreditation of programmes and/or institutions, whatever the meaning given to the word “accreditation”. In fact, what is meant by this word is far from being consensual, even among experts.

I.2 Outcomes of the events

1. The outcomes of the events included in the work programme are reviewed succinctly. The Convention of European Higher Education Institutions has reached a number of conclusions and proposals for Ministers when they convene in Prague. This report does not and cannot replace the detailed conclusions and proposals included in the annexes.

The international seminar on credit accumulation and transfer systems

2. The first of the international seminars of the work programme, held in **Leiria, Portugal**, discussed the issue of credit accumulation and transfer systems. The Bologna Declaration states as one of the objectives the “establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system (...)”. By aiming at “widespread student mobility” and indicating that “credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning”, it called for a system of accumulation of credits, rather than just of transfer, the objective of ECTS.

3. The “ECTS Extension Feasibility Project Report”, of February 2000, commissioned by the European Commission, provided the basis for the discussions. The general report of the seminar is available⁶, but some conclusions may be singled out. A European credit system, providing for accumulation and transfer, is an important instrument for mobility and for the comparability of learning acquired in various settings. Such a system should be built upon ECTS, given that it is already widely known and used. Having concluded that it is difficult to discuss credits and reference levels in an abstract context, it was put forward that, as a contribution to a general approach, work would have to be developed within broad subject areas, at European level⁷.

The international seminar on Bachelor-level degrees

4. The seminar on bachelor-level degrees, held in **Helsinki, Finland**, dealt with the item of the Bologna Declaration that has given way to a spectrum of interpretations and to discussion between the advocates of increased convergence towards a Bachelor-Master-Doctorate structure and those reacting to a strict convergence process. In fact, the Bologna Declaration states that one of the objectives is the “adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles (...)” and that “access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years”. This has been often considered as indicating that the first degree should correspond essentially to three years of study and that longer programmes would be the exception, with the upper limit of four years. However, in some subject areas, as medicine or engineering, and in many countries, a full

⁶ Annex 1.

⁷ The pilot project “Tuning Educational Structure in Europe”, aiming at exchanging experiences and identifying commonly understood profiles and competencies in the disciplines of Mathematics, Geology, Business, Educational Services and History, was presented at the seminar.

professional qualification requires longer studies. This was taken into consideration in the Conclusions and Recommendations⁸, indicating also that it may be worth developing intermediate qualifications, even if not directly relevant for the labour market.

5. Two specific conclusions are worth emphasising, which are independent of the discussion on the degree structure. The first one is the importance of clarifying, for each programme, the orientation and profile and the learning outcomes, as an instrument of transparency. The second one, the fact that all programmes should aim at developing the transversal skills and competencies required by all active citizens.

The international seminar on transnational education

6. The theme of the seminar held in **Malmö, Sweden**, was transnational education⁹. This topic is not specifically identified in the Bologna Declaration, but, as awareness rises, it is becoming a common concern of the signatory countries and is, in fact, related to most of the issues. As a rapidly growing phenomenon, it cannot be simply ignored. Transnational education has been considered both as very positive and very negative. Positive as it is a way of widening the access to higher education to students that otherwise would not have that possibility, but negative as alongside good quality, there is also low quality and even fraudulent offers.

7. An idea has emerged from the seminar¹⁰, that transnational education challenges national higher education and, in doing so, its growth is often a sign that the national systems are not responding to the needs of potential students. The relevance of the code of practice prepared by the ENIC network of the Council of Europe and UNESCO¹¹ was emphasised. Concerted action by the signatory countries related to quality assessment and recognition policies regarding transnational education was considered necessary and it was suggested that it could be promoted through the association of the NARIC/ENIC network and ENQA.

The convention of European higher education institutions

8. The Convention of European Higher Education Institutions, held in **Salamanca, Spain**, had the objective of formulating the views of the European higher education institutions on the Bologna Process and to convey these views to the Ministers of Education¹². The convention expressed the determination to build a European Higher Education Area and discussed six themes: freedom with responsibility; employability; mobility; compatibility; quality; and competitiveness. As the resulting theses will be presented to the Ministers, what follows is a succinct presentation of the main items.

⁸ Annex 2.

⁹ The background document for the seminar was the following report: ADAM, Stephen; "Transnational Education Project Report and Recommendations", Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences, March 2001.

¹⁰ Annex 3.

¹¹ Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, UNESCO/Council of Europe, to be submitted to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee for adoption on the 6th of June 2001.

¹² Annex 4.

9. In the first theme, “Freedom with responsibility: empowering the universities”, the main message is that the universities need autonomy and want to be held accountable. Furthermore, if mutual trust between government and universities on a partnership basis is required, nursing intellectual autonomy is essential.

10. The second theme, “Employability in the European labour market”, led to the view that employability of the graduates is important and that universities should prepare students to cope with the labour market and their future professional role. The universities should contribute to transparency and recognition of qualifications by specifying the learning outcomes in a way that is meaningful for students, employers and others concerned. Diversity and flexibility of programmes and learning experiences have been considered positively.

11. The “Mobility in the European higher education area” was the third theme. Mobility, both horizontal and vertical, was considered a central value, requiring full implementation of recognition instruments, such as ECTS (extended to accumulation and lifelong learning), the Lisboa Recognition Convention, the Diploma Supplement and the ENIC/NARIC networks. The benefits for staff, students and researchers and the need to remove administrative barriers to mobility were emphasised.

12. The fourth theme was “Compatibility: a common but flexible qualifications framework”. The first degree (“Bachelor”) after 3 to 4 years, or 180 to 240 credits, was indicated as the rule, although the possibility of 5 years integrated programmes leading to a “Master” degree should be admissible. The importance of ECTS, quality assurance and thematic networks has been indicated.

13. Under “Quality assurance and accreditation”, the fifth theme, the establishment of a European platform to disseminate good practice and advise on appropriate procedures was proposed. The objective is to foster mutual acceptance of quality assurance decisions in Europe, preserving national and subject differences and institutional autonomy.

14. In the sixth theme, “Competitiveness at home and in the world”, the views expressed were that it is good for students, as it promotes quality, and that it requires more openness and transparency, as well as the European higher education institutions being perceived as welcoming institutions. It calls for strategic networking and to the development of educational trademarks and brands.

15. As a global conclusion, it was emphasised the willingness and capability of the universities to lead the effort to renovate and redefine higher education at a European scale.

Other events

1. Numerous other events have taken place that were motivated by the Bologna Declaration or, in spite of having been programmed independently, were significantly influenced by the process. Although it is not possible to refer to all, it is important to note that a student convention, organised by ESIB (The National Unions of Students in Europe), was held in Göteborg, Sweden, from

the 22nd to the 25th March. With the specific objective “to create input to the Ministers’ Meeting in Prague” and a **Student Göteborg Declaration** was produced¹³.

2. The convention concluded that the Bologna Declaration failed to address the social implications of the process for students. Furthermore, it is stated that students are not consumers of a tradable education service and that it is the governments’ responsibility to guarantee that all citizens have equal access to higher education.

3. The student declaration takes a stand for a system of credits based on workload, a common European framework of criteria for accreditation and a compatible system of degrees. It argues that a two-tier degree system should guarantee free and equal access to all students. Co-operation of the national quality assurance systems is seen as needed to guarantee and improve quality and accreditation is understood as a tool to promote quality.

4. The positive impact of physical mobility of students, teaching staff and researchers is indicated, leading to the need to remove both academic and social, economical and political obstacles. It is considered that the creation of a genuine European Higher Education Area will lead to expanded mobility, higher quality and increased attractiveness of European education and research. The need for all relevant higher education information to be available is seen as a requirement.

5. Finally, the role of students as partners of the Bologna Process has been emphasised.

I.3 The main goals of the Bologna Declaration

6. The overall aim that led to the Bologna Declaration was to build the European Higher Education Area. To that end, several issues were identified as requiring specific action and it is generally accepted that the main goals of the Bologna Declaration are international competitiveness, mobility and employability. The six objectives set out in the declaration are instrumental to these more general goals. However, higher education has broader aims of the social, cultural and human development and an irreplaceable role in a Europe of Knowledge. The European Higher Education Area will be the result of shared values and a common social and cultural heritage, but also of the goals established in the Bologna Declaration.

7. This section aims at reflecting on factors with impact on the main goals of the Bologna Declaration and, thus, setting the scene for the second part of the report where scenarios for future action will be considered.

International competitiveness

8. International competitiveness may be analysed from, at least, two different perspectives, although intertwined: the competitiveness of European diplomas in the international scene and the capacity to attract students from outside the European Higher Education Area. Several factors impacting upon international competitiveness may be identified, such as: readability of degrees by employers, institutions and individuals at large; acceptance of qualifications in academic and professional terms; clear information on the

¹³ Annex 5.

objectives and learning outcomes of the programmes; friendly student services, both educational and non-educational; dissemination of European knowledge production, including textbooks, specialised magazines and research results.

9. One of the main ideas is that European degrees must be clearly understood world-wide, in terms of the knowledge and competencies they document. This requires that the learning outcomes are clearly stated and that they are credible and easily identified as relevant qualifications. Acceptance of the European diplomas by employers and higher education institutions world-wide is important, not only because it means the acceptance of European graduates, but also because it induces the interest of potential students from outside the European Higher Education Area. A precondition for these objectives being achieved world-wide, is that degrees are mutually accepted within the European Higher Education Area, which involves their readability and comparability, as well as credible quality assurance.

10. There are European higher education institutions that have a world-wide reputation and, therefore, do not have any difficulty in having their degrees accepted. Others may have their reputation in a given region of the world, due to special relations between the country to which they belong and that region of the world. These facts may be a positive asset for international competitiveness of Europe, but European higher education institutions are also competing among themselves and a more co-operative and coherent European Higher Education Area may be seen as a threat to some of these specific advantages.

11. International competitiveness may be induced through the promotion of European knowledge production. Diffusion of textbooks, specialised magazines or research results, by conventional means or using information and communication technologies, with world-wide visibility, will enhance the prestige and attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area. Prestige is not an immediate result of quality, but of a continuous perception of quality.

12. Once the interest of potential students from outside the European Higher Education Area has been aroused, the decision to move depends also on the information and the friendliness of the conditions offered to them. Providing the potential students with comprehensive information on academic and living conditions will make the decision to come to Europe easier, as many will be driven away by the unknown. On the other hand, friendly services and guidance to help students to solve day-to-day problems, within and outside the higher education institution, are also a contribution to the decision to move. These facts are, in fact, also important for mobility within the European Higher Education Area.

13. Having graduates of European higher education institutions around the world also has an impact on the acceptance of the European diplomas world-wide. They will tend to act as “ambassadors” of the institutions they attended, provided that they were given access to a good quality education and well supported in the course of their studies.

14. Transnational education is part of the equation when discussing international competitiveness, although it is an issue in itself¹⁴. The global educational services market is growing fast, questions the traditional institutions and can no longer be ignored. Regulatory measures, of a consumer protection nature, may be required to control low quality or even fraudulent offers. However, quality transnational education may be a way of widening the access to higher education to publics that otherwise would not have that possibility. European institutions already participate in this market and the offer will naturally grow. The offer of European programmes available world-wide, through in campus or distance learning, is also a way of making European degrees known, which is potentially good, provided that quality of the offer is assured.

15. In discussing international competitiveness, in a global world, it should be clear who are Europe's competitors. The leading competitor is clearly the United States, as the main international provider of educational services. It should also be clear what are the limits to competitiveness and the role of solidarity with the developing countries. In fact solidarity and competitiveness need not be mutually exclusive. By co-operating with institutions of higher education in the developing countries, the European institutions will help to improve their capacity and, at the same time, compete with the main international providers of education offering locally their programmes.

Mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff

1. Mobility may be considered within the European Higher Education Area and between this area and other regions of the world. The Bologna Declaration focuses specifically on the mobility within the European Higher Education Area that, besides being considered a priority, will establish practices and attitudes that will favour a wider perspective, as the obstacles hindering both types of mobility are similar. Some of the factors influencing mobility are: recognition of qualifications and periods of study; valorisation of periods of study, teaching, researching and training in a European context, both in academic and professional terms; clear and favourable visa policies for these target groups; friendly services and financial support for mobility.

2. Recognition of qualifications and periods of study is unanimously recognised as essential for mobility. There are two fundamental questions for recognition: trust and flexibility. Trust, in the sense that the institution recognising the qualification or the period of study can trust the quality and the procedures of the institution issuing the qualification or certifying the period of study. Flexibility, as qualifications and programmes are not strictly equal and, therefore, what should be considered, in the process of recognition of qualifications or periods of study, are core knowledge and competencies. The issue of recognition arises not only at international level, but also at national level. It is not uncommon that qualifications and periods of study obtained or followed abroad, in a similar institution, are more easily recognised than those attended at a national institution, but belonging to a different subsystem of higher education.

¹⁴ ADAM, Stephen; "Transnational Education Project Report and Recommendations", Confederation of European Union Rector's Conferences, March 2001,

3. The European Union Directives on professional qualifications¹⁵ provide a framework for professional mobility within the European Union. The objective is professional rather than academic recognition, by regulating the access to professions. Another question is that of academic recognition in general.

4. The approach used by the Lisboa Recognition Convention, an initiative of the Council of Europe and UNESCO (Europe Region) signed in 1997, was that recognition should only be refused on the basis of substantial differences and that refusal has to be justified. The approach used in the Bologna Declaration is that of promoting convergence, transparency and mutual trust. The two approaches complement each other in making recognition easier within the European Higher Education Area¹⁶.

5. The development of systems “essentially based on two main cycles”, rather than long programmes leading to a “master” degree will facilitate mobility, especially at the conclusion of the first degree. The “implementation of the Diploma Supplement”, by providing information on the content of a degree and improving transparency, will also contribute to recognition and mobility. A generalised “system of credits”, introducing a common metric, will contribute to the portability of periods of study. Finally, the development of “common criteria and methodologies” in quality assurance will promote trust and, therefore, recognition of qualifications and periods of study.

6. Valorisation of periods of teaching, researching and training in a European context, as important as they may be as an incentive to the mobility of teachers, researchers and administrative staff, is strongly dependent on the statute of these professionals in each country. Many other policy issues, like visa policies or financial support for mobility, were considered in the European Union context, in the form of a Mobility Action Plan that was endorsed by the European Council in Nice¹⁷. This document may be a useful reference for the discussions on mobility within the European Higher Education Area.

7. Clear information and guidance to the students on all aspects of mobility, from academic matters to lodging, health problems or visas, are a contribution to the integration in a different environment, to overcome the cultural differences and make the most of the stay in a foreign country. All this, with minor variations, is applicable to both mobility within and from outside the European Higher Education Area.

Employability

8. Employability is the most elusive of the three main goals of the Bologna Declaration. Some of the factors impacting on employability are: quality assurance; relevance of programmes; clear information on objectives and learning outcomes of the programmes; and accreditation.

9. It should be stressed that the role and importance of employability in higher education programmes is not consensual. A range of opinions may be found. These opinions have an impact on the design of the programmes and results in diversity of their objectives and learning outcomes, even if they are

¹⁵ Directives 89/48/EEC, 92/51/EEC and 99/42/EC.

¹⁶ Report on Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process, Council of Europe/ENIC, January 2001.

¹⁷ Mobility Action Plan, approved by the Council, 9th November 2000.

not explicit. Diversity is not, however, a problem in itself, if there is clear information on what is being offered to the candidates and if the effective learning outcomes match those announced by the institutions. In the case of programmes that are financed by the national budget, it is a matter for governments to decide whether they wish to finance programmes with given objectives and learning outcomes.

10. Given that there are a variety of designations of higher education institutions, degrees and programmes, it is difficult for someone not acquainted with these to clearly identify what kind of knowledge and competencies are documented by a specific degree. The Diploma Supplement is an essential instrument to this effect, in the case of graduates seeking employment or further studies. There is a case for each higher education institution clearly defining for each programme the objectives and learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and of competencies and skills.

11. It is generally accepted that most programmes have employability of their graduates as an objective, even if it is not the only or even the central objective. It may be more widely accepted to say that higher education, especially at undergraduate level, has the objective of preparing people for an active life and citizenship, that includes being employed or self-employed. If this is so, developing competencies, skills and attitudes, such as social skills, initiative, problem solving skills, the capacity to learn or responsibility, are an essential part of the education process. As a consequence, these objectives should be considered in the learning process and included in the definition of the learning outcomes.

12. Given the rapid scientific and technological changes, inducing social and organisational changes, it is increasingly difficult to pinpoint what will be in the future a relevant body of knowledge for the labour market and employment. The only sure values are a solid and broad scientific education, the capacity to apply knowledge and to learn (to follow new developments, to learn from others and from experience) and horizontal skills. This is also a good personal basis for lifelong learning.

13. Quality assurance is generally recognised as an essential tool for higher education. It has mostly a national dimension, in spite of some experiences of international evaluation and the recent establishment of a European network for quality assurance in higher education (ENQA), created to promote co-operation in this field. The national procedures are diverse and there is no need to harmonise these procedures, as long as they are all recognised as valid.

14. From the point of view of employability, it is important that trustworthy quality assurance systems are in place, but also that quality is recognised in a public statement, that is, accredited. Accreditation covers, however, a diversified range of concepts, as it may be applied to programmes or to institutions as a whole and it may be academic or professional. Furthermore, accreditation may be based on an ex-ante or an ex-post procedure, as it may be only based on externally defined standards or take into account the objectives defined by the higher education institution.

15. Employability is promoted by having learning outcomes that are relevant for the labour market, but also by having a clear and easily understood

expression of these outcomes and some form of accreditation that certifies that the learning outcomes are being achieved.

II. SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE

1. This part of the report focuses on scenarios for the future development of the Bologna Process. The first section analyses the issues and makes suggestions of actions favouring the development of a European Higher Education Area. The second section deals with the organisation of the process.

II.1 The European Higher Education Area

2. The main goals and the specific objectives set out in Bologna have received wide acceptance in the academic community and reforms are under way, both at national and institutional level. This does not mean that no questions have been raised or that different stakeholders do not understand the same issues in different ways. This implies that in some questions precisions may be required, other issues may be pushed forward and some may just need monitoring, as they are evolving well.

3. The students' organisations have raised several times the social issues, namely whether higher education is being viewed as a responsibility of the state or as a market. In particular, they have reacted to the use of the words "clients", "customers" or "consumers" to designate students, as these words suggest that they are not an integral part of the academic community and that they have a passive role towards higher education provision. It is a fact that there are different types of providers of higher education and that the role of the learner in traditional institutions and in a commercial type of higher education provision varies considerably.

4. An issue that has come up in many discussions in the framework of the Bologna Process as a relevant one, but does not seem to have been incorporated as a priority for higher education in most countries, is lifelong learning. However, a lot of work has been or is being done, for instance, by the Council of Europe¹⁸ and the European Union. At present, within the European Union, there is a consultation process being conducted on the basis of a Memorandum on Lifelong Learning¹⁹, presented by the European Commission, although not specific to higher education. Given the importance that this issue is gaining, it could deserve more attention within the Bologna Process.

5. The fact that employability is one of the main goals of the Bologna Declaration does not mean that it is the only aim of higher education. Higher education has broader objectives in terms of personal and social development. This issue may require some precision to make it clear that higher education is not viewed as just a way of providing the economy with an adequately trained labour force, but also a means to personal, social and cultural development.

¹⁸ E.g. the 3 year project: "Lifelong Learning for Equity and Social Cohesion: a New Challenge to Higher Education".

¹⁹ A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, European Commission, October 2000.

6. In what follows, as indeed in the whole of the report, the expression “higher education institution(s)” has been used throughout. It stands for any institution of higher education, independently of being included in a university or a non-university sector.

Shared values and concepts

7. In some of the events that have taken place recently, for instance when discussing transnational education, two different views were confronted: higher education as a responsibility of the state or as a market. Whenever the analysis of higher education provision is made on the basis of a market approach, for instance, by referring to students as clients or consumers, a defence of higher education as a responsibility of the state is to be expected. Although there is a tradition of public higher education in most signatory countries, private and transnational provision of higher education has developed significantly. Some forms of this type of provision may be considered as a market, although imperfect, as the students often pay the full cost of their education and providers are competing among themselves. From purely for profit to purely public, tuition free, higher education, a variety of situations may be found.

8. The balance between the objectives of social, cultural and human development in general and of employability is a delicate one. Differences in understanding may vary from country to country, but they also exist within national boundaries.

9. Furthermore, the traditional concept of higher education institution, especially within a university sector, is that of institutions where research plays a significant role. This is not always the case of, for instance, transnational providers. This raises the question of the essential characteristics of an institution or provider in order to be considered a higher education institution.

10. Accreditation, as referred above, may cover different procedures and objectives. Besides accreditation of institutions or programmes, there is academic and professional accreditation, depending on whether it is related to the award of a degree or the access to a given profession. There is a range of approaches and, from the discussions, it was clear that the same word or its translation into the different languages was being used for significantly different concepts.

11. If the European Higher Education Area of higher education is to be built and consolidated, it is important to know to what extent we all share the same values concerning higher education or what are the values that are common to the whole European Higher Education Area. Such a study could also aim at establishing and clarifying concepts and terminology, in order to facilitate discussions and communication in the future.

A European Credit System

12. The idea of a credit system is already in the text of the Bologna Declaration. It is developing with the aim of becoming a credit accumulation and transfer system. How and on what basis such a system could be developed, has been the object of a report and an international seminar. Whether the credit system should be based on workload or competencies was

questioned. Two conclusions seem to be the most consensual: that a European credit system should be developed as an extension of ECTS; and that a reflection by subject area at European level is required.

13. In fact, discussions on what should be the characteristics of an accumulation system have run against differences in understanding, depending on which subject area was used for the reasoning. There is agreement that a workload system, such as ECTS, is not enough and that other type of descriptors of the learning outcomes sanctioned by the credits is needed. It is, however, difficult to agree on such descriptors at an abstract level. Nevertheless, as a basis upon which to build a more comprehensive credit system, the generalisation of the use of ECTS should be pushed forward. This means that national systems, if ECTS is not adopted nationally, should be readily translatable into ECTS and that, at international level, the use of ECTS becomes common practice.

The degree structures

14. The national degree structures are changing. The trend towards a “bachelor”/“master” structure is growing, with “bachelor” programmes of 3 to 4 years curricular (or theoretical) duration. In some subject areas, especially among those with a strong relation to professions and in countries where long one-tier programmes are traditional, resistance to adopt such a model can be found. If changes are to be introduced, they must involve both administrations and institutions, but also professional associations.

15. In what concerns the degree structure, the Bologna Declaration has been interpreted both in a looser or a more rigid way. However, it has induced a convergent movement, in spite of the difficulties in some subject areas. Convergence at the level of programme duration, however, does not always ensure convergence in terms of learning outcomes. But diversity in objectives and profiles, even within a given subject area, may exist within a single country and may lead to relevant and useful qualifications. These qualifications just need to be understood and made clear for the students or candidates, on the one hand, and for the employers and other higher education institutions, on the other.

16. Therefore, given the movement that was created and that the issue is, to some extent, subject area dependent, work by subject area, at European level, should be pursued.

Reference levels

1. As referred to above, a European credit system, understood as a credit accumulation and transfer system, does not result simply by using ECTS. The discussions carried out, in order to identify the main requirements for accumulation, have been confronted with the difficulty of discussing across subject areas. In discussing degree systems, the same need to confront the various national approaches within broad subject areas has been felt. The implication is that, to move forward, it is necessary to reach some agreement on what are the objectives and learning outcomes, in terms of knowledge, competencies and skills, that are relevant to be sanctioned by a degree in a given subject area.

2. These reference levels could be a sound basis for further development, greater converge and readability of European qualifications. A pilot project, supported by the European Commission, is under way and may lead to such an outcome²⁰. This approach could be stimulated in order to promote a common understanding of relevant reference levels, including intermediate qualifications, notably in the subject areas where long one-tier degrees are more often found.

Quality assurance and accreditation

3. The Bologna Declaration calls for co-operation in quality assurance. ENQA is a forum for such co-operation. Most countries have quality assurance systems or are planning the introduction of such systems. However, national systems vary in scope and approach. A fundamental objective of co-operation in quality assurance must be to develop mutual trust, leading every country and institution to trust the quality of the higher education programmes of their partners.

4. Accreditation, in spite of the differences in concept, is a public statement, recognising that a given institution or programme fulfils a given set of reference standards. The reference standards may be defined at national or international level and external to the institution of higher education. The question of who is responsible for setting the reference standards has proved to be a delicate and controversial one, especially if it is considered at European level. Alongside those that firmly believe in accreditation, even at European level, there are those that fear externally imposed European standards, as inadequate to their national system or reality and a restriction on the institutional capacity to innovate.

5. It would be already a significant step towards transparency if, besides the institutions clearly stating the objectives and the learning outcomes of each of their programmes, the fact that these objectives and learning outcomes are being achieved could be certified by a credible agency, such as a national quality assurance agency. ENQA is an adequate forum to discuss how quality assurance could be developed, taking into account the differences among the national quality assurance systems.

Lifelong learning

6. Lifelong learning is mentioned in the Bologna Declaration, in relation with establishing a credit system and acquiring credits outside formal higher education. However, lifelong learning is not only a specific education and training issue, but involves also the employment policies. In fact, a comprehensive lifelong learning policy requires that the education and training systems are open to new publics and offer alternative learning paths to standard qualifications, as well as, a variety of non formal learning opportunities. But also that citizens are given the possibility of using such offers while in employment.

7. From the higher education point of view, the recognition of prior learning and prior experiential learning is one of the instruments to promote access to furthering formal education and, therefore, raise the levels of education

²⁰ See footnote 7.

attainment and of employability. Furthermore, it would be an additional contribution to make higher education internationally attractive and competitive. However, the procedures for accrediting prior learning or prior experiential learning, as a means to gain access to higher education without the formal qualifications or to obtain credits to be used towards a degree, are complex and require a rigorous approach to be credible.

8. Some countries already have experience in applying such procedures. Through co-operation within the European Higher Education Area, this experience and the good practices could be exchanged and shared, leading to a wider diffusion of lifelong learning policies.

Response to the needs of candidates and students

9. If European higher education is to be attractive for students all over the world, it is not enough to ensure quality, the acceptance of European degrees world-wide or the prestige of European higher education institutions. These are relevant factors, but clear information on the programmes and the conditions offered to attend the programmes are also important. Similar issues to those that may be raised in the context of intra-European mobility.

10. The type of information required is different, depending on the level of study. For instance, for post-graduate studies, in particular at doctorate level, research plays a much greater role than at graduate level. The information required by the students may be made available, as has already been suggested elsewhere, by creating a portal of European higher education, through which information on the national systems and institutions may be found. Such a portal, once sufficient adhesion has been ensured, may have an additional effect of emulation, with national systems and institutions competing to prove the value of their offer. The EU Commission, as has already been proposed, could contribute to develop this portal or gateway.

11. Once interest has been aroused, it is necessary that the candidates decide to move. Such a decision is easier to take if he/she knows what to expect, in terms of costs and living conditions, including where to lodge, what access to health care is provided or what visa formalities are required. But what is offered must also be appealing and a number of academic issues may be mentioned. The type of support they may expect to have to solve problems within the institution, the recognition of his/her qualifications or the flexibility of adapting the studies to his/her previous learning, including the possibility of previous learning being awarded credits towards the degree or diploma, are all relevant issues.

12. A flexible attitude in academic matters and an attitude geared towards the needs of students, besides clear and ready available information can be an effective instrument of attractiveness.

Mobility

13. Mobility has been considered above in the context of the main goals of the Bologna Declaration. The role of the Community programmes is widely acknowledged and could have a greater impact if it wasn't for the inevitable budget limitations. There are also regional mobility programmes. Nevertheless, the issues raised in the Mobility Action Plan endorsed by the European Council in Nice are relevant in the framework of the European

Higher Education Area and could also be adopted as a general reference in this context.

14. The European Union Directives on professional qualifications, although only applicable within the Union, could also be used as a reference for professional mobility within the European Higher Education Area.

Academic recognition

1. Academic recognition within the European Higher Education Area may be viewed in two complementary perspectives. The first one is that, as convergence progresses in terms of qualifications, degrees, learning outcomes, credits, quality assurance and quality certification, etc, academic recognition between countries will certainly be made easier. Nevertheless, this approach, in fact the Bologna Declaration approach as a whole, may not solve all and every problem of academic recognition and a more general approach will continue to be necessary. The Lisboa Recognition Convention offers such an approach, provided that it has been signed and ratified by the Bologna signatory countries.

2. Whatever the approach used, there is no substitute for a flexible attitude on the part of who has to recognise academic qualifications, unless it is made automatic. The criteria for recognition must be based on similarity of level and of the core of knowledge and competencies, rather than on strict equivalence of content²¹. There is still a significant number of issues that need to be addressed to improve the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of recognition²²

Transnational education

3. Transnational education is growing and challenging traditional education. The growth of transnational education may be considered as an indicator that traditional education is unable to respond to the needs of students, either by lack of capacity or by insufficient adaptation to the real needs of students. Its growth increases the pressure to find a solution to the recognition of its degrees and diplomas. The Lisboa Recognition Convention excluded the qualifications obtained through transnational education from its domain of application. However, a code of good practice is being developed, as a follow-up, and may provide the basis for a common approach to the recognition procedures of transnational education qualifications.

4. A pro-active approach to transnational education could be adopted by the signatory countries. Transnational education offered outside the European Higher Education Area is a way of making the European degrees more widely known world-wide and some signatory countries are already promoting the offer of their own programmes abroad. Joint efforts from institutions of higher education involving two or more countries from the European Higher Education Area could be promoted, ensuring the quality of the programmes with the same standards as traditional provision. As convergence progresses and common reference levels, in terms of objectives and learning outcomes,

²¹ A "Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study" will be submitted to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee for adoption on the 6th of June 2001.

²² "Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process", DGIV, The Council of Europe, January 2001.

may be agreed, joint distance, e-learning, multi-lingual programmes could be envisaged and promoted.

Comparable data

5. The Bologna Declaration establishes common goals and objectives for the signatory countries. Ministers will meet regularly to monitor the developments and to decide on further actions. Data is collected in the various signatory countries in different forms, making it difficult to have a quantified perception of how the process is evolving. The collection of data for the Bologna Process, in a comparable form in all countries, would facilitate the monitoring of progress achieved.

6. This comparable data, rather than comparison between countries, should aim at translating the progress made. For instance, the number of students from outside the European Higher Education Area studying in the signatory countries, could be an indicator of competitiveness or attractiveness. This is a clear case where comparison between countries should not be made, as differences in attractiveness may simply result from linguistic barriers. The number of students, teachers, researchers and other staff studying or working for a given period abroad, within the European Higher Education Area, could monitor mobility. As the number of joint programmes involving institutions from two or more signatory countries could indicate the development of European co-operation.

7. If the decision is taken to collect such comparable data for the Bologna Process, a technical study is required before the signatory countries reach an agreement.

Background studies

8. Besides the development of comparable data, some topics will require that the reality be better known, as a basis for further discussion of the issues and of further action. In what concerns competitiveness, it would be a useful basis for political decision to know what are the motivations of the students to follow higher education programmes in Europe, both of nationals of the signatory countries and students from outside the European Higher Education Area. The motivation to follow transnational education and for lifelong learning could be included in such a study on student motivations.

9. In what concerns employability, understood in a European-wide approach, to understand the characteristics of education, such as profiles, knowledge, competencies or skills, which favour employability, could be a reference for higher education institutions in a European rather than just national context. This could include a survey of regulated professions and existing professional accreditation systems.

10. Mobility has been the object of previous reports and studies within the European Union, such as the green paper on the obstacles to transnational mobility. However, recognition of qualifications remains an important issue. A survey of the systems and practices of recognition of qualifications, including transnational degrees, the recognition of periods of study, both within each country and between countries, and the instruments for accreditation of prior learning, in an integrated perspective and at European scale, could provide a

basis for further developments. Such a survey could draw on existing expertise, such as that of the ENIC and NARIC networks.

II.2 The Bologna Process

11. The Bologna Declaration process requires that a continuous impetus be maintained. In the first two years of the process, other countries and organisations have been interested in joining the movement. Higher education institutions and the academic community in general did not remain indifferent. This is an achievement in itself. The process has been conducted on a rather informal basis, with no clearly specified mandate for the steering and enlarged follow-up groups, but to push the process forward. The rotating presidency has been able to keep the process rolling and has certain advantages, but it is also a fragile arrangement. The memory of the process is passed on from presidency to presidency, relying on each presidency to ensure that the chain is not broken. As the process develops, the need for a memory of the process will certainly become more important.

12. Such facts point to the need to reflect on how to ensure continuity and momentum of the process. Assuming that an enlarged group and a steering group, or some similar arrangement, will continue to exist, their mandates should be specified. Namely, if the adhesion of new countries and organisations is the decision of ministerial conferences or if the enlarged group is given the mandate to accept new adhesions. If this is the case, the conditions for new adhesions and whether there is a limit to the geographical reach of the European Higher Education Area, should be specified.

13. The follow-up group feels the responsibility of ensuring the success of a process that is showing great vitality and has aroused widespread interest. As a consequence it would like to invite the Ministers of Education of the signatory countries to reflect on the best organisational arrangement to ensure that the process is efficiently run and the goals are fulfilled.

ANNEXES

Reports and conclusions of the events²³

²³ The documents, available in electronic form, were reformatted.

<p style="text-align: center;">Annex 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">International Seminar on Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Leiria, Portugal, 24 – 25th November 2000</p>
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Conclusions²⁴

General Rapporteur: Stephen Adam, University of Westminster

- The revolutionary forces currently impacting on European education represent huge difficulties and challenges for all involved in educational and training. These forces include globalisation and advances in information technology that are leading to rapid adjustments in national education systems. Learning is becoming more student-centred and flexible as credit-based systems are developed. These changes fundamentally challenge our notions as to how, what, whom and where we teach, as well as how we assess. Those who fail to confront and adapt to these questions face a difficult future.
- The '*ECTS Extension Feasibility Project Report*' of February 2000 clearly concluded that the ECTS was an excellent tool to aid transparency and convergence as envisaged by the Bologna Declaration. The study outlined the key advantages as well as the problems facing any extension of ECTS to a credit accumulation system within a lifelong learning perspective. These issues provided the agenda for the seminar workshop groups.
- The workshops achieved a number of things including:
 - Workshop 1: Examined problems associated with the quantification of credits. Understandably, it did not resolve these difficult problems but did highlight the need for credit definitions in terms of 'total student workload' as well as in terms of competencies.
 - Workshop 2: Considered APL and APEL. It found that learning can take place anywhere but the real challenge is to devise rigorous systems to accredit and measure such learning. The credit-based measurement of APEL is particularly important for models of lifelong learning.
 - Workshop 3: Explored distance and lifelong learning issues. These both benefit from credit-based approaches to provide the flexibility that such modes and concepts require. Educational and training programmes expressed in learning outcome and competencies were also seen to have advantages over traditional (input-based) content descriptions.
 - Workshop 4: Examined the use of the Diploma Supplement and Europass within a credit accumulation framework. Both were found to be valuable and workable devices to enhance transparency and recognition.
- The presentation by Pedro Lourtie on Credit Accumulation and Transfer and the goals of the Bologna Declaration reminded the seminar participants of the importance of their work in helping solve some of the problems of competition, employment, mobility, and convergence faced by European education.

In conclusion, the outcome of the two-day international seminar was clear:

1. In Europe we are faced by enormous common educational challenges.
2. Higher education can no longer exist as an island isolated from secondary, vocational and adult education. It must integrate more with these sectors by building appropriate bridges that help create a workable system for lifelong learning. All national education systems need to reflect on their own structures and practices in the light of these imperatives.
3. There was a consensus that credits and credit accumulation are the best devices to help create the converged yet flexible education systems required by European education.
4. The proposed project '*Tuning Educational Structure in Europe*' was endorsed.
5. Building a European education area will not be easy but we have excellent devices, such as ECTS, to help in its creation.

²⁴ Extract from the General Report.

December 2000.

Annex 2
International Seminar on Bachelor-Level Degrees
Helsinki, Finland, 16 – 17th February 2001

**Conclusions and Recommendations of the Seminar
to the Prague Higher Education Summit**

Rapporteur: Anita Lehikoinen

Benefits of developing bachelor-level degrees

These conclusions concern first degrees or first cycle degrees commonly referred to as bachelor-level degrees. For the sake of clarity, the term bachelor-level degree will be used in this document.

Most European countries have, are introducing or are planning to introduce a higher education degree structure based on a sequence of bachelor, master and doctoral degrees. Reforms in this direction have been carried out in countries with unitary higher education system as well as in countries with binary or dual higher education systems.

Long first study cycles, high drop-out rates and the lengthening of university studies are problems shared by many European countries. Well-planned and efficiently realised bachelor degree programmes help reduce the number of students discontinuing their studies without any qualification and thus facilitates their placement in the labour market while possibly contributing to shortening overall study times. There is a considerable lack of comparability in the European degree structures which is an impediment to mobility.

The bachelor-master (two-tier) structure offers several advantages in comparison with the long, often rather inflexible curricula leading straight up to the master level which have been traditional in many countries. A main benefit is that students can be offered programmes which allow more easily individual flexibility, which also promotes mobility. The two-tier structure makes room for national and international mobility by contributing to the modularisation of study programmes. In the age of life-long learning one of the most significant factors speaking in favour of a two-tier structure is that it allows interaction between studies and working life.

Most of the professionally oriented higher education institutions offer at the moment bachelor-level degrees, and in many countries master-level degrees are being introduced to these institutions. This development may serve the purpose of diversification of higher education provision. It may also contribute to the efficient use of resources because students do not need to change their orientation at the transition point.

The bachelor/master structure has become a world standard. Its adoption will facilitate better recognition of European degrees both within Europe and in the world and will make it more attractive for international students to consider studying in Europe.

Framework for bachelor-level degrees in Europe

The promotion of mobility in Europe requires increased transparency and comparability of European higher education qualifications. In order to achieve this need some common criteria for the definition of bachelor degrees are needed. This framework should be flexible enough to allow national variations, but at the same time clear enough to serve as a definition. These broad definitions should be achieved already in the Prague Summit of Higher Education.

The following factors could be seen as useful common denominators for a European bachelor-level degree:

Bachelor-level degree is a higher education qualification the extent of which is 180 to 240 credits (ECTS). It normally takes three to four years of full-time study to complete the degree. Bachelor-level degrees play an important role in the life-long learning paradigm and learning to learn skills should be an essential part of any bachelor-level degree.

It is important to note that the bachelor-level degrees, often referred to as first degrees can be taken at either traditional universities or at professionally-oriented higher education institutions. Programmes leading to the degree may, and indeed should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.

In order to increase transparency it is important that the specific orientation and profile and learning outcomes of a given qualification are included in its title and explained on the Diploma Supplement issued to the student. Information on different study programmes should be transparent to enable the students make informed choices.

Even bachelor degrees which serve as an intermediate qualification preparing students for further study should be based on a proper curriculum. They should not only be seen as a part of a longer curriculum, as some students may wish to change direction or to choose a graduate programme or specialisation offered at another institution.

Labour market relevance

In the European tradition higher education has never been an island. There is a strong need for close interaction between higher education and society at large. Labour market relevance should not undermine higher education's cultural value.

There are many different ways in which bachelor-type degrees can be relevant to the common European labour market. While many curricula ought to be geared towards specific professions and immediate entrance onto the labour market, others need to prepare students for further studies and a later entrance. All curricula should include transversal skills and competencies required from all active citizens in Europe. This entails long-term development of educational contents.

In European countries labour markets expect higher education qualifications from more and more young people. This is likely to be more difficult in countries offering only long one-tier qualifications. The higher education system is expected to offer independent, shorter degrees of the bachelor type geared specifically for labour market needs. At the same time there are needs for updating and upgrading qualifications and skills of the present labour force.

Disciplinary issues

Different disciplines have characters of their own and they have to be taken into consideration when developing degree structures. It should be clear that in some fields which involve professional accreditation bachelor-level degrees will not always serve as independent qualifications leading to full labour market relevant professional competence. However, in those fields too an intermediate qualification may be worth developing for the reasons mentioned above.

In all fields, reasonable transition mechanisms between bachelor and master programmes should be established, both within the same higher education sector and between different higher education sectors. These transition mechanisms should enhance also interdisciplinarity.

Reforming structures only is not enough. Transparency and comparability of transferable core competencies expected from graduates of bachelor and master programmes in broad subject areas are needed at the European level. Higher education institutions and their European

networks involving professional bodies and other stakeholders should develop these common guidelines.

Annex 3
International Seminar on Transnational Education
Malmö, Sweden, 2 – 3rd March 2001

Report

General Rapporteur: Rolf Hoffmann

Towards a common policy on Transnational Education (TNE) – the need to cooperate and address this issue together on a European level was the message which the majority of participants took home as one of the most important results of 1 ½ days of intense discussions. TNE is about to surface as one of the major – and most pressing - issues in the process of internationalization of Higher Education in Europe in the near future, in particular in countries with federally financed systems. TNE as the most obvious manifestation of globalization in higher education is flourishing in almost every country, it is demand-oriented and thus introduces a commercial component that is completely new to most higher education systems in Europe.

While the physical presence of TNE institutions is obvious, it's implications for the existing systems are less visible: Higher Education, in European countries usually state-driven and financed, based on (in the best case) federal mid-term planning and with little need to compete, are suddenly confronted by very successful competitors which operate client-minded, and out of the defined Higher Education matrix. They offer international curricula and degrees which prepare students for a global market, they charge tuition and they seem to supply modules and degrees (and models) that state-driven systems often lack. Students – and often the best students – choose TNE-providers over state universities, and if they cannot find appropriate offers in their home country in Europe they go abroad to study there, mostly in the US. Hence, the consequences of TNE, it's challenges of and chances for the various existing systems in Europe, and various approaches to a coordinated response to TNE defined the discussion of the Seminar.

Results

All participants agreed that the findings in the draft report being presented by Stephen Adams are a very sound and well-researched basis to facilitate the discussion on a mutual approach to a common policy on TNE. It was agreed that there was little to be added, or changed to the results and recommendations. Minor suggestions were made (such as a re-draft of 4.22) and will be incorporated by the author. Some issue though drew special attention and were subject to very intense, yet rarely truly controversial discussion.

Information

There was a general concern that much too little is known about the impact of TNE, particularly with regard to

- students and their motivation to choose (and often prefer) TNE institutions and offers over state institutions in their own country
- students, their strategic goals and their expectations with regard to higher education, curricula, degrees and quality of existing state-driven systems
- acceptance of TNE degrees (vs. recognized state degrees) on the labor market
- the current situation of intra-European and trans-European export and import of Higher Education products
- strategic options for TNE and traditional HE models in the future with regard to the growing need for internationalization

- best practices in TNE
- the size and the future demand of the potential 'market', in Europe and on a world-wide basis.

It was very strongly recommended that studies should be commissioned as soon as possible to address these questions since national authorities and actors cannot develop policies without substantial quantitative and qualitative assessment of the situation.

Quality

It was generally agreed upon that the issue of quality, quality assurance and its international transparency would have to become the main focus of all parties involved in TNE in the future. While some state-driven systems had long ago developed a set of internal quality measurements which still may differ widely from country to country they are now faced with the challenge to re-define quality and quality assurance parameters in study and research both to position themselves on the international HE market, and to guarantee at least minimal common national and European standards. For example, top-seed TNE providers (e.g. branches of US Ivy League universities) which actively compete 'next door' with well-established European universities for the best students may create the need for European institutions to quickly develop and apply comparable and transparent quality standards, as much as they need to distance themselves at the same time from degree mills of questionable origin.

It was recommended that

- TNE providers (including European institutions) should be subject to strict quality assurance on a national level (host country; or country of home mother institution if member on EU)
- That every country should set up a proper quality assurance system acknowledged within the EU
- That Naric/Enic should be more aware of their responsibilities with respect to TNE
- That a European platform for quality assurance could be helpful in order to provide the exchange of ideas, approaches and – in particular - to facilitate the coordination of existing initiatives and networks such as Naric and ENQA.

Accreditation can be part of quality assurance, but it is likely to succeed only if generally accepted quality standards are being applied. Different national accreditation standards will multiply problems and dilute quality transparency rather than establish it. Accreditation has become an important tool of efforts to control TNE providers in some member states already, but there is little, if any, coordination or cooperation among states in setting up a commonly agreed-upon set of criteria. Accreditation as a standardized tool to guarantee quality in TNE is most likely successful only if it is developed on a supranational (here: European) level.

Social issues

In various discussions it was mentioned that the social issue in TNE was not being considered appropriately. In particular there seems to be too little concern over the impact of TNE on

- the possibility of a gradual transformation from non-fee systems to fee-based systems ('value for money' – approach)
- the development of national and European student loan and grant schemes in a rapidly opening international market
- the responsibility of Governments for student's needs
- the commercialization of higher education when being subjected to GATS.

It was obvious throughout the discussions that too little is known about the links between students, their motivation with respect to their preferred field of study, the labor market and its demands, and TNE providers which obviously seem to fill a certain gap. The internationalization of labor markets require a set of new qualifications from students that state-driven national systems cannot easily provide without giving up traditional national positions and protective behaviour. Students who can move freely from one institution to another in a harmonized yet diversified European Higher Education landscape are most likely to fulfill the requirements of future global employers. They will look for the best education, and they will choose those institutions which can provide this in the most efficient manner. The push-and-pull factors have changed over the last years, and the principles of the Lisbon agreement will further This change significantly to a configuration of rules guarding the HE market following the principle of motivation (by students) and attractivity (of providers).

This new global development requires that internationally accepted quality standards are sound, transparent, applicable to both private and state institutions and transferable.

It was generally agreed that these standards need to be developed as quickly as possible on the broadest European level.

Apart from the strict application of quality assurance, there was consent that there should be as little formal regulation of TNE providers on a national or European level as possible, that in fact a cooperative approach would serve much more the needs of all parties involved. The emergence and success of TNE providers in many countries should be seen as a helpful indicator of the problems of existing state systems, of options for future developments and even best practice models in some cases. Institutions in some countries have already begun to act themselves as TNE providers, and there will be an increased competition for highly qualified students worldwide in the years to come. TNE opens the door to a first step towards a de-regulation of European Higher Education, and thus the need towards a *common* approach.

17 March 2001.

Annex 4
Convention of European Higher Education Institutions
Salamanca, Spain, 29 – 30th March 2001

Conclusions of the work of thematic groups

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The main purpose of the Salamanca Convention was a political one : higher education institutions wanted to formulate in an easily readable way their goals and intentions, the leading principles, major requirements and some of the difficulties that need to be overcome on the way towards the European Higher Education Area.

European universities showed that they want to shape their own future in the new European context. They clearly expressed their will, their intention and their determination to take up the challenge of the Sorbonne/Bologna declaration and to be proactive in the process of building by 2010 the European Higher Education Area.

This short document – also a basis for the *Salamanca Message* to the European Ministers of Education when they meet in Prague on 18-19 May 2001 – sets out the main results of the work of the twelve groups who, during the Convention, debated six key themes taken from the Bologna Declaration of June 1999.

1. Freedom with responsibility: empowering universities

Universities need new freedom if they are to adjust rapidly to "environmental changes" and to new local, national and international partners. The variety of their new tasks calls for freedom of action as the only way towards more efficiency. Universities have to be able to enter into new partnerships, including with commercial partners, and they need to be able to act quickly. This calls for new leadership, the conditions of which depend on the institutions' ability, flexibility and independence to plan strategically.

Universities are not just requesting more freedom, however. They are also willing to accept the corresponding responsibility: they want to be held accountable for what they are doing and for how they use the freedom granted to them.

Thesis 1: Freedom with responsibility

Universities as legal entities need autonomy in, and want to be held accountable for:

- ◆ strategic planning, setting goals and priorities
- ◆ funds allocation
- ◆ selection of partners, locally, nationally and internationally, in research and in teaching
- ◆ selection of research areas
- ◆ definition of curricula
- ◆ management of human capital, in particular the hiring the professors
- ◆ setting of admission rules for students.

Mutual trust between government and universities on a partnership basis is a pre-requisite. Last but not least, nursing intellectual autonomy is still the core task and requirement of academic institutions.

2. Employability in the European labour market

Study programs have to be valid academically and relevant to the labour market at the same time.

Flexibility in curricula and study courses, as well as diversification, respecting different talents and employment prospects are prerequisites. Curricula must meet well defined targets. The introduction of first cycle programmes is important because of the growing number of students. The articulation of programmes and degrees in two main cycles is a meaningful option if the curriculum takes care of employability (in terms of the competencies acquired) both for students transferring to employment after the first degree and those doing so after the second degree.

Thesis 2

Higher education institutions see the employability of their graduates as an important goal and a necessity. This requires greater programme flexibility and the development of curricular concepts promoting the lifelong employability and adaptability of students. Furthermore it means diversity and multiplicity of entry and exit points of learning experiences.

Thesis 3

Employability in a university context means:

- ◆ a well developed imagination
- ◆ the ability to approach and to solve a problem systematically and methodically applying substantial knowledge
- ◆ the capacity to lead social processes.

The overall structure of university programmes and each element thereof must be targeted towards the development of the above mentioned personal skills, while allowing for a great variety of curricular approaches and for competing course designs.

Thesis 4

Institutions of higher education should contribute to transparency and recognition by explaining their curricular approach and the competencies they strive for in a way that is meaningful for students, employers and others concerned. In other words, they should prepare their students to cope with the labour market and their future professional role (preparation for job search and managing one's career). In conjunction with their public and private partners, they should establish career centres for such purposes.

3. Mobility in the European higher education area

Mobility of students and staff promotes the ability to cope with a new cultural and learning environment and to understand other cultures. It is a requirement in view of today's globalisation but it also promotes European coherence and enriches the scientific outlook.

Two types of mobility should be promoted: horizontal mobility (i.e. the student stays with a host university for one or two terms and then returns to complete a degree from his/her home institution) and vertical mobility (i.e. the student finishes one period of studies at a first institution and then moves to a second one to continue his/her studies. An ideal point for changing institutions in this way is after the completion of one of the cycles).

Necessary conditions for mobility are:

- ◆ ECTS credits used both for exchange and for accumulation;
- ◆ the Diploma Supplement;
- ◆ a more generous approach to recognition issues;
- ◆ the possibility for both virtual and physical mobility, the former not being a substitute to the latter;
- ◆ the availability of funding for staff and student mobility;
- ◆ transparent quality assurance systems in all countries and subject areas.

Thesis 5

Mobility is a core value of the European Higher Education Area.

Existing instruments of recognition should be fully implemented:

- ◆ ECTS (extended to accumulation and life long learning)
- ◆ Lisbon convention
- ◆ Diploma Supplement
- ◆ NARIC/ENIC network.

Thesis 6

Physical mobility should be promoted as an educational experience and cannot be substituted by virtual mobility. A common European approach to virtual mobility is needed, however. The benefits (i.e. the added value) associated with mobility for staff, students and researchers should be publicised. Administrative and structural barriers and obstacles to mobility must at long last be removed. Countries party to the Bologna process should commit themselves to abolish any law/regulation imposing nationality requirements for holders of permanent and temporary positions at their higher education institutions. Portable grants and loans should be made available to students, together with other suitable incentives to both individuals and institutions.

Thesis 7

The creation and development of the European Higher Education Area depends on the recognition of the essential role of higher education institutions. They are a driving force in the whole process. Their clear internationalisation policy needs to take into consideration:

- ◆ the crucial importance of teaching staff with international experience;
- ◆ realistic language provision (this requires the abolition of any law/regulation prohibiting higher education teaching in a foreign language) and the provision of certain courses in widely spoken foreign languages;
- ◆ the need to offer all students in undergraduate education, regardless of their field of specialisation, the possibility to take a number of credits in foreign languages;
- ◆ good quality, user-friendly information of students concerning international opportunities.

4. Compatibility: a common, but flexible qualification framework

Thesis 8

Higher education needs to be structured in such a way that after 3 - 4 years (or rather 180 - 240 ECTS credits) a student should be eligible for a Bachelor-type degree. This degree should either lead to immediate employment or provide preparation for further studies leading to a Master degree. Under certain circumstances a university may decide to structure a curriculum as a 5-year integrated (i.e. unbroken) programme leading directly to a Master-level degree. Professional and discipline networks have an important role in informing such decisions.

Thesis 9

ECTS should be used by universities not only for credit transfer but also for credit for accumulation:

- ◆ by giving credits for assessed learning gained inside or outside the university;
- ◆ subject to the requirements of regulated professions and the right of universities to decide whether credits gained outside are acceptable or not.

Quality assurance is an essential part of this process.

5. Quality assurance and quality certification

Thesis 10

The internationalisation of quality assurance is a necessary response to the current globalisation trends and to the challenges of building a European Higher Education Area. Accreditation is one answer to these challenges and quality assurance mechanisms are a pre-requisite for good accreditation procedures.

Some kind of European platform or clearing system needs to be organised with the full support of higher education institutions in order to disseminate good practice and advise accrediting bodies on appropriate procedures. It should foster the mutual acceptance of quality assurance decisions in Europe while preserving national and subject differences and institutional autonomy and not overloading universities. The role of ENQA in this process should be considered.

6. Competitiveness at home and in the world

Competition promotes quality and is therefore good for students. But universities need more operational freedom and a fair financing scheme to enter true competition. More diversity of curricula will further competition. More competitiveness is needed to attract students from overseas. Competitiveness and co-operation are not mutually exclusive. Competitiveness means academic quality in the first place and cannot be reduced to a commercial concept only.

Europe needs to be in a position to attract the best brains from all over the world, but this requires the speedy removal of inadequate immigration and labour market regulations.

Competition raises issues within Europe (East versus West, South versus North) and there is the danger of an inner-European brain drain. Specific measures could be:

- ◆ the introduction of study programmes taught in major world languages;
- ◆ more marketing in non-European countries, developing educational trade marks and brands;
- ◆ the development of adequate services for foreign students and scholars, allowing European higher education institutions to be perceived as welcoming institutions;
- ◆ competition with other continents through strategic networking.

Thesis 11

Higher education institutions are willing to take the responsibility of operating in a competitive education arena, but this requires more real managerial autonomy (going beyond classical academic freedom), a flexible regulatory framework and fair financing.

Thesis 12

Competition serves the quality of education and is good for students, higher education institutions and other stakeholders. It must be accepted and promoted and at the same time underpinned by reliable quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms that are readable inside and outside of Europe.

Thesis 13

Being globally more competitive also calls for more openness, transparency and competition at home. It requires a revision of our service and marketing culture in line with the realities and values of European higher education, such as cultural diversity, research orientation and social responsibility. Universities in certain accession countries are not yet equipped to compete on an equal basis and need special help.

Conclusions

European universities and their organisations are willing and capable to take the lead in the joint effort :

- ◆ to renovate and rejuvenate higher education;
- ◆ to redefine it at a European scale;
- ◆ to promote the employability of their graduates and the mobility of their students and staff;
- ◆ to further the compatibility between institutions and curricula;
- ◆ to assure quality in the European Higher Education Area;
- ◆ to be more competitive, not excluding cooperation;
- ◆ to address the specific difficulties of universities in certain parts of Europe.

Prerequisites are enough freedom and appropriate funding, as well as the removal of immigration and labour market restrictions.

European higher education institutions want to be in a position to shape their future in the European Higher Education Area. If they all want it, their message will be heard and it will happen.

Annex 5
Student Göteborg Convention
Göteborg, Sweden, 22 – 25th March 2001

Student Göteborg Declaration

PREAMBLE

We, the student representatives in Europe, gathered in Göteborg at the Student Göteborg Convention from the 22nd to the 25th of March 2001. Here we adopted the following declaration on the future of the Bologna Process. ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe is and has been actively involved in the construction of the European Higher Education Area.

In June 1999, ESIB and its members, the national unions of students had to invite themselves to the Ministerial meeting on “A European Higher Education Area” in Bologna. Two years later, at the Prague Summit, ESIB is a keynote speaker. The growing recognition of the student input in the process is the result of a strong commitment of European students to promote a high quality, accessible and diverse higher education in Europe.

INTRODUCTION

ESIB sees the Bologna process as the crucial step towards a Europe without boundaries for its citizens. A European higher education area should include all European students on an equal basis. The creation of this area is a common responsibility of all European countries and should take into account the political and socio-economic differences in Europe. The reason for creating a European higher education area is the improvement of all national higher education systems, by spreading good practices and promoting cooperation and solidarity between the European states.

THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Although the Bologna Declaration pointed out the basic aspects of the European dimension in higher education, it failed to address the social implications the process has on students. Higher education enables students to acquire the skills and the knowledge they need further in life, both personally and professionally. The social and civic contributions must be present as the primary functions of the higher education institutions. Higher education institutions are important actors in civic society; therefore all members of the higher education community should be involved. Students therefore are not consumers of a tradable education service, and as a consequence it is the governments' responsibility to guarantee that all citizens have equal access to higher education, regardless of their social background. This means providing students with adequate funding in the form of study grants and the higher education institutions with enough funding to exercise their public tasks.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

As stated earlier, accessible higher education of a high quality is of utmost importance for a democratic European society. Accessibility and diversity have traditionally been the cornerstones of European education and should remain so in the future. Next to this and to ensure that all programmes of higher education institutions are compatible and exchangeable, a system of credits based on workload should be implemented in the whole of Europe. A common European framework of criteria for accreditation and a compatible system of degrees is needed, in order to make sure that credits accumulated in different countries or at different institutions are transferable and lead to a recognisable degree. A two-tier degree system should guarantee free and equal access for all students and should not lead to the exclusion of students on other than academic grounds. To guarantee and improve the quality of higher education, a strong European cooperation of the national quality assurance systems

is needed. Accreditation, being a certification of a programme, takes into account, among other criteria, the quality assurance process and should be used as a tool to promote quality.

A European higher education area promoting improvement and cooperation requires physical mobility of students, teaching staff and researchers. Mobility is also a way to promote cultural understanding and tolerance. Obstacles to mobility exist not only in the academic world. Social, economical and political obstacles must also be removed. Governments should guarantee foreign students the same legal rights as the students in the hosting country and higher education institutions should take the responsibility to provide students with mobility programmes.

The creation of a genuine European higher education area as outlined above will lead to expanded mobility, higher quality and the increased attractiveness of European education and research. The measures taken in the Bologna process are only a first step towards transparency. The provision of general information must be encouraged. To improve the level of information Europe needs a fully implemented use of a Diploma Supplement and the creation of a readily accessible database with all relevant higher education information.

THE ROLE OF STUDENTS

Finally, it must be stressed that students, as competent, active and constructive partners, must be seen as one of the driving forces for changes in the field of education. Student participation in the Bologna process is one of the key steps towards permanent and more formalised student involvement in all decision making bodies and discussion fora dealing with higher education on the European level.

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe, being the representative of students on the European level, must be included in the future follow-up of the Bologna declaration.

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe will commit itself to continue representing and promoting the students' views on the European level.

25th March 2001.