

## **The Bologna Process 2020 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade**

We, ministers, responsible for higher education in the 46 countries of the Bologna Process convened in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, on April 28 and 29, 2009 for our bi-annual meeting to take stock of the achievements of the Bologna Process and to establish the priorities for the European Higher Education Area for the next decade. We have adopted the following conclusions and policies:

### **I. The European Higher Education Area**

1. Over the past decade a strong and robust European Higher Education Area has been created covering 46 countries that are party to the European Cultural Convention and firmly rooted in Europe's intellectual, scientific and cultural heritage and ambitions. It is an area in which students can more and more choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and, in spite of problems that still have to be solved, benefit from smooth recognition. It is an area in which institutions of higher education have fully embraced their entwined roles of education, research and innovation to contribute to the advancement of a knowledge society in a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe. It is an area in which systems of higher education have become more compatible making European Higher Education more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents.

2. There has been strong adherence to the creation of the European Higher Education Area, especially since the Bologna Process has managed to instil European higher education with a permanent sense of cooperation by encouraging and increasing dialogue between governments, higher education institutions, students, staff, employers and other stakeholders. The contribution from international institutions and organizations has also been a significant one.

3. The main objectives set out by the Bologna Declaration and the policies developed in the subsequent years are still valid today; the Bologna Process up to 2020 shall contribute to making Europe a highly creative and innovative region as well as an attractive global partner in the advent of a global knowledge society. The European Higher Education Area in 2020 shall also be an area where higher education is a public responsibility, regardless of the question whether the institutions are public or private, and where all institutions of higher education are responsive to the wider needs of society and the economy through the diversity of their missions and purposes and through the nexus between education and research. The necessary ongoing reform of higher education systems and policies will continue to be firmly embedded in the European values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and active participation of students and staff as well as social equity.

### **II. The Bologna Process, its achievements and its consolidation**

4. The Bologna Process has led to greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education and has made it easier for learners to move between them. The structure of higher education is being modernized with the adoption of a three-cycle structure including the possibility of a short cycle within or linked to the first cycle; quality assurance guidelines have been adopted, a European register for quality assurance agencies has been created; an agreement has been reached at European level to adopt qualifications frameworks linked to the overarching European Higher Education Area framework and based on learning outcomes and workload to facilitate recognition. Moreover, the Bologna Process has availed itself of the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and compatibility of programmes.

5. The full and proper implementation of these objectives will require continual momentum after 2010. The European Higher Education Area shall more firmly be based

on convergent degree structures and commonly agreed standards and instruments that guarantee the quality and the transparency of provision and qualifications. Progress on agreements for straightforward and fair recognition procedures and decisions supported by the development of national qualifications frameworks remains a priority. This will require continued coordination at the level of the European Higher Education Area and with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. The coming decade shall witness the implementation of the full potential of the concept of student centred learning and learning outcomes.

### **III. Challenges ahead**

**6.** Our societies currently face the consequences of a financial crisis with its effects on economic growth. In order to bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, higher education must be considered a long term investment in people preparing our societies to address the challenges of the decade to come and therefore remains a priority for public investment.

**7.** The links between education and the labour market need reinforcing. The advent of a Europe of knowledge that is highly creative and innovative rests upon the ability of its citizens to summon the competences that are necessary to address the new challenges in society and in the economy.

**8.** European higher education will more specifically face the major challenges posed by globalisation and demography. The demographic challenge of an ageing and increasingly diverse population and workforce in a knowledge society can only be met by fully engaging in lifelong learning policies and practices as well as by widening the participation in higher education. Social and human growth are indispensable components for European citizenship.

### **IV. Better learning for the future: priorities for the decade to come**

- ***Quality of European higher education***

**9.** For European higher education to respond adequately to those and other challenges and to contribute to their solution, excellence must be pursued at all levels of higher education and in fulfilling the diversity of missions of institutions, in teaching and research as well as in innovation and community engagement. In that respect high quality in higher education continues to be a solid basis on which the European Higher Education Area should be built.

- ***Curriculum reform and learning outcomes***

**10.** The pursuit of the goal of student centred learning means that curricular reform will be an ongoing process. Since the start of the Bologna Process higher education institutions and their academics, in close cooperation with student representatives, have taken up the challenge to develop international descriptors and reference points for a growing number of subject areas (for instance with the Tuning project). Acknowledging the main responsibility of institutions of higher education and with due consideration for programme diversity, curriculum developers will be encouraged to further engage in a fruitful exchange with all stakeholders with a view to designing subject specific curricula which are student centred and based on learning outcomes.

- ***Nexus between education and research***

**11.** Doctoral programmes are crucial for fostering innovation and creativity in society. Innovative doctorate programmes should respond to the changing demands of a fast-evolving labour market and high quality disciplinary research should increasingly be complemented by inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral programmes, bringing added value for the career development of early stage researchers. The number of Ph.D's should be increased.

- ***Lifelong learning***

**12.** Widening participation through lifelong learning and empowering the individual to fully seize the opportunities of higher education as well as of the labour market and thus to fully contribute to a highly creative and innovative society will be the focus of the national and institutional plans for the decade to come. Lifelong learning is conceived of as a multifaceted concept, which may involve climbing higher up the qualifications ladder, extending knowledge and understanding, gaining new skills and competences or simply pursuing learning to enrich one's personal growth. Lifelong learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths as well as work based trajectories. This should be accompanied by a system of validation in which the acquired knowledge, skills and other competences are given fair recognition, regardless of whether they have been obtained through traditional study programmes or non-formal learning paths. Intermediate qualifications within the first cycle deserve further development and implementation.

**13.** The implementation of lifelong learning policies requires strong partnerships between public authorities, institutions, students, employers and employees. The charter on lifelong learning proposed by the European University Association will serve a basis for defining those partnerships. Successful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning, linked to the qualifications frameworks and be supported by adequate organisational structures and funding. The lifelong learning perspective shall be integrated into the institutional practice of each higher education institution.

- ***The social dimension***

**14.** The social dimension calls for equitable access into, successful progress through and completion of high quality higher education for the whole spectrum of the population in their various walks of life and age groups; it requires a learning environment of great quality geared to the needs of a diverse student body. The student body within higher education should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations. In order for this to happen access into higher education will be widened by fostering the potential of students from socially disadvantaged groups and by providing adequate conditions for the completion of their studies. Significant progress should be made within each participating country over the next decade.

- ***Employability***

**15.** Higher education should equip students with the sustainable knowledge, skills and competences that individuals need in their careers whatever their position and status. Employability is also empowering the individuals to renew those skills and competences throughout their working lives. For this to happen, higher education institutions and employers, also involving students and graduates, shall engage in a meaningful dialogue. This will allow institutions to be more responsive to employers' needs and employers to better understand the institutional perspective, catering not only for the short-term needs of the labour market but training responsible, inventive and entrepreneurial graduates for the future with its often unforeseeable needs.

**16.** Higher education institutions shall improve the provision, accessibility and quality of their careers and employment related services to students and alumni. Work placements at home or abroad can also be an adequate way to offer the students the opportunity to develop and define for themselves the employability skills and competences and to gain experience in a business environment.

- ***International openness***

**17.** Higher education is a global phenomenon. European higher education institutions will be further encouraged to embed their activities in an institutional culture of internationalisation and global collaboration. The attractiveness and openness of European higher education will be highlighted. Competition on a global scale will be complemented by policy dialogue and cooperation based on partnership with other regions of the world most prominently through the organization of Bologna Policy Fora, involving a variety of stakeholders.

Transnational education should be governed by the same guidelines for quality education as those that apply to other education programmes and should adhere to principles of public responsibility.

- **Mobility**

**18.** Mobility of students, early stage researchers and staff, embedded in institutional policies to enhance the quality of programmes, will strengthen the academic and cultural internationalization of European higher education. Mobility is important for personal development and employment. In an increasingly multicultural society, it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with it. Mobility should also encourage linguistic diversity, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European higher education area and it increases cooperation between institutions. It shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area, with a target of 20% of the student population by 2020

**19.** Mobility policies shall bring together political initiatives with a range of practical measures pertaining to the funding of mobility, recognition, available infrastructure, visa and work permit regulations. Flexible study paths and active information policies, full recognition of study achievements, study support and its portability are necessary requirements to foster student mobility. These policies should aim at more mobility of a higher quality, at a more balanced flow of incoming and outgoing students across the European Higher Education Area and at a better participation rate from the diverse student body.

**20.** Opportunities for mobility shall be further developed and diversified so that mobility will be considered the rule and no longer the exception. Joint degrees and programmes shall become common practice. In all degree programmes curricula will be designed in such a way that they provide structured opportunities for mobility. Mobility shall also be an important ingredient of research training.

**21.** As far as mobility of staff and early stage researchers is concerned, framework conditions will be established to simplify the application processes for immigration into the EHEA as well as within and to ensure appropriate access to social security and portable pension rights for mobile staff. Career structures should be adapted to facilitate staff mobility, including open recruitment.

- **Data collection and transparency tools**

**22.** Improved and enhanced data collection will help monitor progress made in the attainment of the objectives set out in the social dimension, employability and mobility agendas, as well as in other policy areas, and will serve as a basis for benchmarking.

**23.** The Bologna Process has increased transparency through its convergent degree structure, its qualifications frameworks and its compatible quality assurance mechanisms. At the same time, there is increasing differentiation in the missions and profiles of higher education institutions. Institutions shall be supported to achieve excellence in those areas where they show their major strengths and which they define as their most relevant mission and public policies will fully recognize the value of various missions of higher education, from teaching and research through community service to its key role in social cohesion and economic and cultural development. Governments in close cooperation with other stakeholders shall stimulate this development.

**24.** In the light of this greater diversification of higher education, the Bologna Process shall encourage the creation of and will monitor the implementation of new instruments developed inter alia by international institutions and designed to point out the strengths of institutions with diverse mission statements.

These instruments meant as a mapping of higher education and as information on the performance of institutions of higher education should be relevant information tools for students and academic staff alike; moreover, they should help higher education institutions to compare and identify their relative position, and to strive for excellence. All such instruments, which should be developed with full stakeholder involvement, need to

relate closely to quality assurance and recognition and should be based on development of adequate indicators and sound data collection.

- **Funding**

25. Higher education institutions have gained greater autonomy along with rapidly growing expectations to be responsive to societal needs and to be accountable. Within a framework of public responsibility recognizing that public funding remains a priority, multiple funding is seen as an opportunity to guarantee further sustainable development of institutions and their autonomy.

## **V. Operational mid term goals**

26. The following operational goals will be pursued by 2012:

- Lifelong learning
  - National strategies will be developed which encourage each higher education institution to integrate a lifelong learning perspective in its institutional practice.
- Social dimension/widening participation
  - National action lines shall be defined and national targets shall be set accordingly by each country to increase the overall participation and retention, in its higher education system and especially the participation of underrepresented groups according to the diversity of its population.
- Employability
  - Raising awareness of the Bologna Process: governments, together with institutions of higher education and the representative organizations shall continue to promote the benefits of the Bologna process reforms, including the benefits of a first cycle degree;
  - Governments should take the lead in promoting dialogue with the social partners;
  - information, advice and guidance on career paths: the provision, accessibility and quality of careers and employment-related services to students and alumni shall be improved.
- International openness
  - Bologna policy fora will be further developed to strengthen the policy dialogue with countries that are not party to the European Cultural Convention;
  - A network of national contact points for information and promotion activities will be set up.
- Mobility
  - National action plans for mobility will be developed with targets for inward and outward mobility. Mobility in the third cycle will also be monitored;
  - Full implementation of a policy of portable grants and loans;
  - Mobility shall become part of internal and external quality assessment;
  - Efforts will be reinforced to facilitate the delivery of visas and work permits for the purpose of academic mobility.
- Recognition and qualifications frameworks
  - Regular quality assurance procedures will incorporate recognition of qualifications and of prior learning and include the transparent provision of information.
  - Coherent recognition practices within a country and between countries will be ensured through cooperation between higher education institutions and the national ENIC/NARIC centres. Institutional guidelines and

recommendations for recognition ensuring implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention will be established.

- Self-certification of national qualifications frameworks by 2012.
  - Elaboration of agreements for mutual recognition of qualifications based on compatible quality assurance or accreditation mechanisms and national qualifications frameworks.
- Nexus between higher education and research
- Joint doctorate degrees, European doctorates and joint supervision arrangements shall be further developed and considered as an important instrument of international inter-institutional cooperation.

## **VI. The organisational structure**

**27.** The present organisational structure of the Bologna Process is endorsed as being fit for purpose. In the future, the Bologna Process will be co-chaired by the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU country.

**28.** In order to interact with other policy areas, the BFUG will liaise with experts and policy makers from other fields, like immigration, social security and employment.

**29.** The monitoring of the progress will continue. Eurostat together with Eurostudent will still be entrusted with data collection as defined above, in co-operation with Eurydice; the work will be monitored by the Bologna Follow-up Group.

**30.** We entrust the Bologna Follow-up Group to prepare a work plan to address the challenges identified in this Communiqué, allowing the future integration of the data collection results and the outcome of the independent assessment of the Bologna Process.

**31.** We will meet again at the Bologna anniversary conference jointly hosted by Austria and Hungary in Budapest and Vienna on 11-12 March 2010. The next regular ministerial conference will be hosted by Romania in Bucharest in April 2012. The following ministerial conferences will be held in 2015, 2018 and 2020.