|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Bologna Follow-UP Group Secretariat     |  | | --- | |  | |
| |  | | --- | |  | |

Brief summary on EHEA challenges - Danish response

The Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation hereby sends our national response to the BFUG working group on structural reforms concerning the challenges of the EHEA.

Revision of the ESG

Denmark conceives quality assurance and accreditation as essential elements to develop a common area of higher education, where mobility is an incorporated part of the options for future and current students. We recently started converting the system from accreditation of educations to accreditation of institutions. It is, of course, important that the ESG are incorporated in the new system, and we intend to follow the revision process closely.

The revision of the ESG is an opportunity to assure that the guidelines are flexible and sufficiently detailed to assure best-quality educations, as well as assuring that the educations matches the needs of a competitive and changing labour market. In Denmark the employability aspect has been incorporated in the accreditation procedure, and the institutions have to demonstrate active dialogue with relevant partners at the labour market. It must be considered if this aspect can be incorporated in the revised ESG.

Last but not least, it is an important aspect to focus on assuring that the ESG-standards are applied in all Bologna countries.

Recognition

Although the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is the only juridical text within the Bologna process it is evident that cross border mobility is still not a smooth process due to barriers of recognition. Recognition is the glue that ties the EHEA together and fair recognition for academic or professional purposes is still not always applied.

This is mainly due to the structural settings of recognition and not the LRC itself, which in fact holds the tools for fair and smooth recognition. The clash lies between the institutional autonomy and the political aim of freedom of movement. In most EHEA countries the institutions have full autonomy to decide on recognition regardless of political aims of enhancing the free mobility of learners and professionals. The higher education institutions are in some cases not aware of the principles and procedures outlined in the LRC and hold on to the method of strict subject to subject comparison of degrees and courses when assessing foreign qualifications for admission or credit transfer decisions. It is not always fully acknowledged that different pathways can lead to the same learning outcomes.

The Bucharest Communique encourages that higher education institutions and QA agencies should assess institutional recognition in internal and external quality assurance with a view to examining whether institutions have a common institutional recognition policy and if this policy is in line with the principles and procedures of the LRC. Such a bold mechanism might have the effect that the principles and procedures of the LRC will become better known and actually applied in institutional recognition and facilitate that recognition is done according to the same agreed principles throughout the faculties and institutes of the institutions. It will also strengthen the links between quality assurance and recognition and build on the mutual trust among countries and institutions. This will still be a soft tool respecting the academic autonomy of the institutions and should also be discussed in relation to the revision of the ESGs.

The pathfinder group on automatic recognition can also be an important leap forward in securing fair recognition. A move towards more systemic recognition of degree types instead of individual equivalence comparisons can be an important gain for mobility. It should be evident that the level of bachelor degrees can be fully recognized within the EHEA. In fact if the EHEA countries cannot accept the level of bachelor degrees from other countries this is contradictory to the concept of an EHEA.

Qualification frameworks

National Qualification Frameworks hold the potential of being the most important driver for the transition to a learning outcome oriented culture in higher education. The NQF’s are all about learning outcomes and disclose what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completing a learning process. NQFs enhance the employability agenda by describing that academic degrees are not only focused on subject knowledge and research but also develop students’ generic competences and skills and prepare them for a labour market outside their field of research.

The development of NQFs and the self certification process to the Bologna Framework and referencing to the EQF also hold the potential for being an important transparency tool for mobility and recognition. However, there is also a tendency that the construction and designing of the NQFs and aligning them to the overarching frameworks is done without engaging experts in recognition or Bologna experts and thus not taking into account the effects of the Bologna process. We therefore see that qualifications which we in the Bologna process generally acknowledge as being comparable are being referenced to different levels of the EQF and even discussions of different levels of access qualifications have arisen during the referencing processes. This raises the potential threat that NQFs will rather than act as transparency tools become muddy waters and hinder free mobility of students.

On the other hand it must be respected that NQFs are designed and constructed for the purposes of national reforms and also for the inclusion of recognition of prior learning and non-formal qualifications. There is a need to clearly communicate the nature and purpose of the NQFs and what we can and cannot expect from them as transparency tools for mobility and recognition. The drafting of a subsidiary text on the use of QF’s in recognition by the Lisbon Recognition convention committee must be subject to hearings in both recognition and EQF networks.

Third cycle

Denmark strongly supports the Bucharest Communiqué’s commitment to explore how to promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle. Although it is important to maintain a diversity of doctoral studies, the diversity should be in content of European programmes, not in for instance their quality or the employability of the graduates. Useful outcomes of the BFUG’s work on this issue could be proposals on the use of transparency tools in the third cycle (e.g. Diploma Supplement), on how to improve quality and quality assurance procedures in the third cycle and on how to improve the employability of third cycle degree holders (e.g. by looking at best practice from degrees with a strong industrial element). Another key element would be to identify and strengthen mechanisms, policies and incentives that promote international mobility in the third cycle.

Transparency

A key challenge for the EHEA is the use of Diploma Supplements. The 2012 EHEA Implementation report shows that Diploma Supplements are issued automatically and free of charge in only 25 countries. Moreover, the report suggests that Diploma Supplements in many cases are not prepared properly and do not provide the needed information to the users. Here the Bologna experts can play a role in the development and quality assurance of Diploma Supplements.

Significant work is also still ahead of many countries in regards to linking ECTS credits with learning outcomes. The revision of the ECTS Users’ Guide will hopefully expedite these efforts.

Allan Bruun Pedersen

Senior Adviser