



Report on the State of the Bologna Process Version 1

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Published by: HERODOT Network

Date September 15th 2009

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Summary

Data was gathered from members of the HERODOT network on the state of Bologna implementation.

The results indicated that the Bologna Process is having a significant impact on the work of higher education institutions. The majority of countries continued to be in an implementation phase concerning Bologna objectives.

More than half of the Bologna objectives were being met in the majority of cases. Nearly all the replies indicated that three cycles were being used and that the mobility of staff and students was readily available. Qualifications from other countries were largely being recognised and most institutions were developing courses in Geography using learning outcomes. Some aspects of Quality Assurance were being used in most organisations,

However, several Bologna goals were not yet being addressed by most institutions. In particular, there appeared to be little activity to improve the employability of graduates and the quality of learning and teaching. There was also confusion about the implementation of Bologna and the creation of a European Higher Education Area.

The country profiles indicated a range of different situations. Some were meeting all the Bologna goals while others were not or were opposing the developments. This confirms that the Bologna characteristics of the European higher education landscape continue to include a great deal of heterogeneity. This in turn reflects on the differing structural organisation, governance and the operating conditions under which they exist. The diversity between countries largely exists because of cultural and legislative differences.

The important role of international networks and professional associations in implementing and sustaining Bologna goals at department and individual levels and was raised.

1. Context and background

Higher education is major service industry in Europe. According to van der Ploeg and Veugelers (2007) the EU has almost 4000 higher education institutions, of which about 2000 are universities. That is to say they combine higher education with research. These institutions take an increasing number of students. There were less than 9 million in 1991, 12.5 million in 2000 (Commission of the European Communities, 2003a) and more than 17 million students by 2004 (European Commission, 2005a).

Many more young Europeans have a higher education qualification today than in previous generations (Commission of the European Communities, 2003a). According to OECD statistics, the percentage participation in higher education in the EU-19 had also grown by 2004 to 24% of the population aged 24-65 (OECD, 2007). Higher education in Europe is for the most part considered to be a public service. Families and individuals do not have the tradition of contributing to course fees. As a result enrolments have been larger and grown faster in other parts of the world.

Universities are considered by the European Commission (2006) to be central in shaping the future of Europe. They are the key to building a knowledge-based economy and society. However, according to Rodrigues (2002), if Europe is to be competitive, higher education was in need of in-depth restructuring and modernisation. In some countries, continuous reform and innovation of the university sector has already been taking place.

Article 126 of the European Union Treaty makes provision for common European issues, like education to be the subject of broad regulatory aims. The Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992, encouraged cooperation between educational establishments in member states of the European Union in order to develop high quality education. This important step in the development of Europe, as a series of educational programmes was launched by the European Union targeting young people and the learning process.

Under Articles 149 and 150 of the Maastricht Treaty, member States maintain full responsibility for the content and organisation of their education and training systems (Maurer, 2003). Under this system of subsidiarity, European higher education has been encouraged to increase its competitiveness, so that it will attract and retain students who have outstanding talent. However universities in Europe generally have much lower financial resources than their equivalents in the other developed countries, particularly when comparison is made with those from the USA.

The Sorbonne Declaration provided the initial impetus for the reform of European higher education structures. It laid the foundation for the Bologna Process by seeking the improvement of external recognition of national higher education systems to facilitate student mobility and employability. The Ministers of Education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom committed their countries to harmonising the structural design of European higher education. The essential principles established were: to create a European higher education space and research area that would recognise the need for Europe to be competitive in a global economy, and to add value for students through international experience and a mastery of foreign languages.

2. The Bologna Declaration and the European Higher Education Area

In June 1999, 29 European ministers in charge of higher education met in Bologna to lay the basis for establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010 which will promote the European system of higher education worldwide.

In the Bologna Declaration, the ministers affirmed their intention to:

- adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adopt a system with two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate)
- establish a system of credits (such as ECTS)
- promote mobility by overcoming obstacles
- promote European co-operation in quality assurance
- promote European dimensions in higher education

The Bologna Declaration is an undertaking to reform higher education structures and systems in Europe in a convergent way. It reflected some common European problems that different Member States had been facing. The process to find a solution originated from challenges related to the growth and diversification of higher education, increasing the employability of graduates, meeting skills shortages and operating successfully in the increasingly competitive international education marketplace. The Declaration confirmed that coordinating the restructuring and reorganisation of higher education was very important to European goals.

The Declaration acknowledges the necessary independence and autonomy of universities. It explicitly referred to the fundamental principles which had been laid down by the Magna Charta Universitatum which was signed by 430 Rectors of universities worldwide in Bologna in 1988 (Magna Charta Observatory, 1988). It stressed the challenge to achieve a common space for higher education within the framework of the diversity of cultures, languages and educational systems in Europe.

2.1 The Bologna process

The European Commission agreed to support and foster a Bologna process designed to create European Higher Education Area that would be consistent, compatible and competitive, through reforms which converge around certain defining objectives. The Bologna process aimed to achieve:

- the adoption of a common framework of readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement;
- the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries, with first degrees no shorter than 3 years and relevant to the labour market;
- an ECTS-compatible credit systems (European credits) also covering lifelong learning activities;
- a European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods;
- the elimination of remaining obstacles to the free mobility of students, trainees, graduates and teachers, as well as researchers and higher education administrators (European Ministers of Education, 1999).

There has been very strong political support for the Bologna process from 45 nations across Europe. In each country, the transformation has officially been laid down through national laws and regulations. This demonstrates an acknowledgement of the significance of the role that higher education plays in wealth creation and towards the social and cultural benefits in the knowledge society. The four primary objectives of Bologna, namely mobility, competitiveness, employability and attractiveness, imply a consumerist rather than social ideological commitment towards higher education. Bologna-sceptics suggest that they are simply policies, driven by the principles of the global market, which provide incentives for institutions to change the nature of their organisation and especially the framework of research and education from a predominantly discipline-inspired structure to a market-driven system. It could be argued that that these developments are likely to divert expertise away from other important activities.

Decision-making in the Bologna process continues to acknowledge the diversity in Europe's higher education systems. The "process" is carried out by consensus between the Ministers of national governments, not by the European Commission. The most important forum in the decision-making process is the two-yearly ministerial review of Bologna, where the Ministers in charge of higher education in each of the signatory countries meet to assess progress and to plot the course for the near future. The most recent ministerial summit was at Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium in 2009, this followed on from those in Prague in 2001, Berlin in 2003, Bergen in 2005 and London in 2007. These ministerial meetings are organised and administered by the Bologna Secretariat and supported by two groups: The Bologna Follow-Up Group and the Bologna Process Board (Figure 2.1).

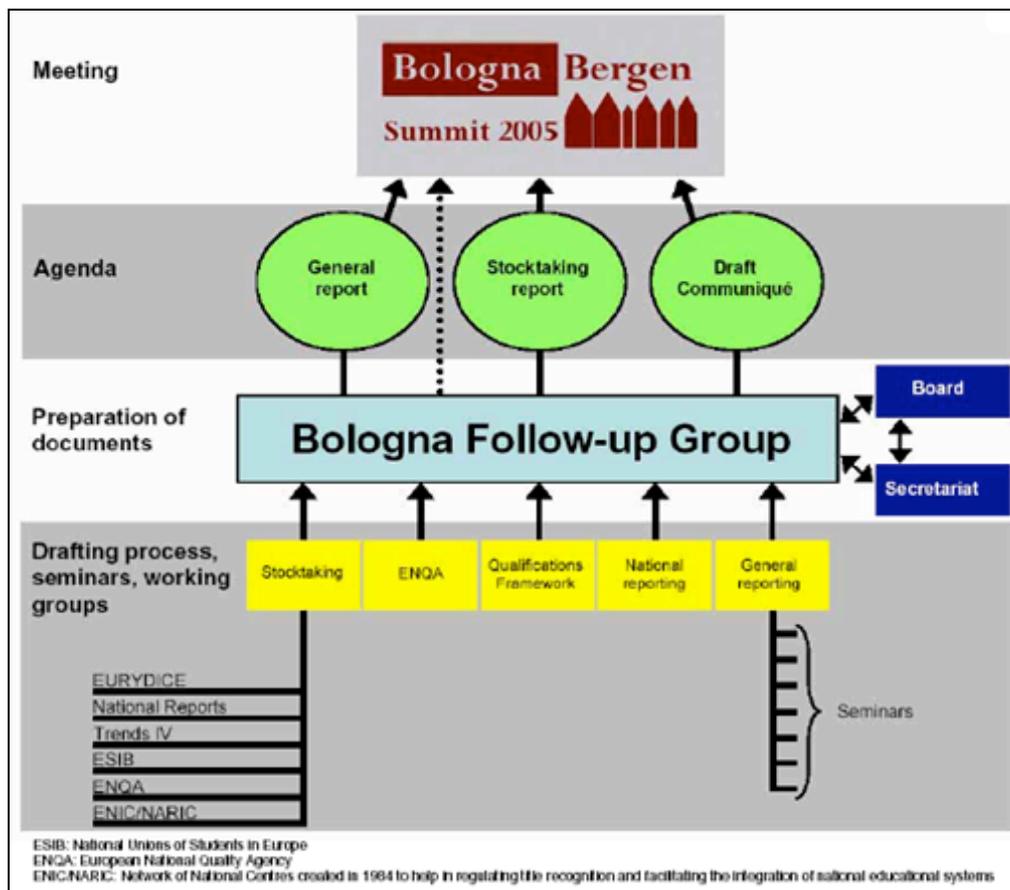


Figure 2.1: Bologna Structures (adapted from: The Bologna Process from a Norwegian Perspective, available from: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Norway/041014Fact_Sheet_Bologna-Process.pdf)

The Bologna Process is seen as the key driver of improved standards in teaching and learning and research and innovation in higher education. At the Barcelona European Council meeting in March 2002 an enhanced ambition to make Europe “a world reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training and the most-favoured destination of students, scholars and researchers from other world regions” was agreed (Commission of the European Communities, 2003b). In order to do this a number of key objectives were set out, which included providing adequate resources for lifelong learning in the knowledge society, by making the best use of existing resources and increasing total investment in higher education by public authorities as well as by private enterprises and individuals.

2.2 A European Higher Education Area

The Bologna Declaration stated the intention that by 2010, a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) would be in existence.

The Council of Ministers adopted three strategic objectives:

- Increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union
- Facilitating the access of all to the education and training systems
- Opening up education and training systems to the wider world

(Council of the European Union, 2001)

The EHEA promised the convergence of systems of higher education across Europe. It also would encourage the emergence of more specialised ‘expert’ institutions. In the light of these challenges, European higher education would be set to act as a world-class reference. This represented an important stage in the continuing development of co-operation between academic institutions and was an approach which seemed to emulate the North American system.

In the final conclusion of the Lisbon summit in March 2000, the Council of Ministers formulated the ambitious objective for the next decade to transform the European Union into the most competitive and dynamic science-based economic area in the world. The Heads of State confirmed the role and

importance of education and training and set priorities for concerted action at European level. The future strength of the European economy and society were said to depend on the skills of its citizens, and that these in turn needed to be continuously updated, as a characteristic of a knowledge society.

Whilst Bologna is voluntary, it has resulted in a sequence of major national policy initiatives which have brought about more change in higher education across Europe than any other international instrument or policy.

2.3 Bologna developments

The Helsinki European Council meeting of 10 and 11 December 1999 was a turning point on which the foundations for the expansion of Europe were set. At the Lisbon meeting in March 2000, the European Council invited the Education Ministers to reflect on the concrete future role and objectives of education systems in order to prioritise common European concerns. As a result, Lisbon established that the European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy (European Council, 2000a). These changes affect every aspect of people's lives and require a radical transformation of the European economy. As a result the goals of the Lisbon Strategy were to deliver stronger, lasting growth and to create more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Lisbon also established the goal of an information society for all, establishing a European Area of Research and Innovation, creating a friendly environment for starting up and developing innovative businesses, especially small and medium sized enterprises,

Subsequent meetings and documents have expanded and clarified the Bologna Process. The Lisbon European Council of March 2000 set the strategic goal for Europe to become by 2010 "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Council, 2000b). It emphasised the central role of education and training in responding to the challenges implied by this objective. To achieve

this, a university system of excellence must be in place, with universities recognised as being the best internationally. Lisbon also emphasised restructuring and flexibility, with a focus on lifelong learning, research and development, and knowledge industries.

At the 2001 meeting in Prague, Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to establish the EHEA by 2010 and increased the number of objectives by including three more action lines. These were, an emphasis on the role of students, promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA, and lifelong learning a part of the Lisbon Agenda. They also agreed to meet biennially to review and appraise progress towards the EHEA and to determine future priorities.

The Heads of State and Government invited the Ministers of Education to establish agreed concrete objectives for European education and training systems. In February 2001, on the basis of a proposal from the Commission, the Council adopted a Report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and European Commission, 2002). The resultant Declaration confirmed the three strategic objectives for education and training systems as, improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union, facilitating access for all to education and training systems, and opening up education and training systems to the wider world (Council of the European Union, 2002). These have been the key goals on which subsequent actions and activities have been based. The Council Education Ministers and the Commission underlined that making the European Union the leading knowledge-based economy in the world would only be possible if education and training functioned as factors of economic growth, research and innovation, competitiveness, sustainable employment and social inclusion and active citizenship. Ministers in charge of education and training acknowledged their responsibility in this process and re-affirmed their determination to meet the challenge.

At the Barcelona meeting in spring 2002, the Heads of State and Government set a new challenge with the announcement that the EU should become a

world reference for the quality and the relevance of its education and training. It should be the most attractive world region to students, scholars and researchers. This implies increased investment levels in parallel with reforms to increase the quality and relevance of all sectors of education. European enlargement, seen as a major challenge, would also be an opportunity to encourage change. Education has been at the heart of European hopes and dreams, providing the driving force for the new knowledge-based European economy and society (PURE, 2005).

In 2002, the Joint Quality Initiative proposed so called 'Dublin Descriptors' for Bachelors and Masters courses (JQI, 2002), which defined key outcomes for Bachelors and Masters degree programmes. These statements have since been extended to doctorate level (JQI, 2004b) and for short programmes (JQI, 2004a). They subsequently were adopted by the Bologna Follow-Up Group in their proposal for a Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area to the ministerial meeting in Bergen in May 2005. The resultant generic, policy oriented descriptors were also complementary to the more specific outcomes of the Tuning project (European Commission, 2002), which were being developed at the level of areas of disciplinary knowledge.

In 2003 the European Commission confirmed that most European universities were not globally competitive when compared with those in developed countries. They said that to address this, university education in Europe would need to be transformed by building and implementing common educational policies (Commission of the European Communities, 2003a). However, the European Union was not able to directly regulate the educational systems of its Member States due to the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore a new strategy to influence the management of and investment in higher education and training was required. The European Council thus called for a challenging programme to modernise the European education system. It also stressed a general reflection on the concrete objectives of education systems and for a substantial annual increase in per capita investment in human resources.

The 2003 Berlin Meeting then sought to speed up the realisation of a European Higher Education Area. The Ministers recognised that there was considerable synergy between the establishment of a European Higher Education Area and a European Research Area. As a result, they discussed a framework for doctoral study, so the previously agreed two-cycle system was increased to three (Conference of Ministers, 2003). Ministers with responsibility for higher education requested the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to undertake a stocktaking exercise on the progress made in three priority action lines, quality assurance, the two-cycle degree system and the recognition of degrees and periods of study. In March 2004, the Bologna Follow-up Group established a working group to carry out this out and report on progress and issues at the next meeting of Ministers (Bologna Follow-up Working Group, 2005).

In the European Commission's view, Europe needed a new kind of relationship between the university and the nation. In April 2005 the Commission published a communication on the role of universities in relation the Lisbon Strategy, where it confirmed that Europe must invest in strengthening education, research and innovation (European Commission, 2005c).

A mid-term evaluation of progress on the implementation of the Bologna reforms was undertaken and presented at the Bergen Conference in May 2005, the number of countries involved in Bologna had expanded to forty-five and Australia was invited to attend as an observer. The review revealed that while progress towards the EHEA varied across member states, the first stage of the process to put into place the legislative structures and formalities had been completed by 33 member states. It was confirmed that more than half of students in the participating countries were enrolled in a two cycle degree structure. The Bergen Communiqué prioritised three objectives: quality assurance, the establishment of the two-cycle degree regime across the Bologna region, and the recognition of degrees and accreditation. The Ministers responsible for Higher Education also adopted an overarching framework for qualifications and committed to begin adapting national

frameworks for qualifications by 2007 and completing the process by 2010. They decided that promoting a European system of higher education worldwide should be based on the principle of sustainable development and cooperation with other parts of the world.

Ministers stated that they expected the review of the progress of the Bologna Process to continue in the areas of degree systems, quality assurance and recognition of degrees and study periods. It was hoped that by 2007 the implementation of these aspects would be largely completed. They also stressed some more concrete areas in which they expected progress to be measured by then. These were the implementation of standards and guidelines for quality assurance, the implementation of national frameworks for qualifications, the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including those at the doctorate level and creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning.

After Bergen, the EUA meeting and subsequent Glasgow Declaration of April 2005 provided the basis for further policy discussion between universities (EUA, 2005). It set out actions that sought to ensure that universities can make their full contribution to building Europe as a major player in a global environment. The COPERNICUS-CAMPUS initiative was also established, which proposed to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on incorporating sustainable development into the Bologna Process and to give feedback through the Bologna Follow-Up Group to the Ministers in 2007 (COPERNICUS-CAMPUS, 2005).

The Bologna conference held in London in May of 2007 had the rather ambitious ultimate goal of consolidating the EHEA by 2010. There were three main findings from the 2007 stocktaking. Firstly, there had been good progress in the Bologna Process since Bergen (Bologna Follow-up Working Group, 2007). The three-cycle degree system was reported to be at an advanced stage of implementation across the participating countries. Access from one cycle to the next had improved, and more structured doctoral

programmes were being provided. Implementation of quality assurance had also started. Secondly, the outlook for achieving the goals of the Bologna Process by 2010 was said to be good, but there remained some significant challenges which still had to be faced. There had been good progress on some specific action lines and indicators, though as all aspects of the Bologna Process were interdependent they needed to be considered as a whole. The themes recognised as linking all actions were the focus on learners and on learning outcomes. Finally it was agreed that stocktaking measures were effective as an integral part of the Bologna Process strategy. This involved collaborative peer-reported self-evaluation, which was an effective means to encourage individual countries to take their own actions at national level. All countries had made progress, and stocktaking was making it visible.

The European Commission sees the Bologna Process as a very grand intergovernmental initiative, which is an essential part of the Lisbon Strategy. It has the broad objective to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide. The European Commission (2007) officially maintains that the aim of the European Higher Education Area is to provide citizens with choices from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures. The result of this has been to raise European ambitions related to Bologna.

In 2005, Ministers in Bergen adopted a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Higher Education and confirmed commitment to establishing national qualifications frameworks (European Commission, 2005b). These decisions linked with the Commission plans for lifelong learning. In order to facilitate the desire for borderless professional mobility, it was hoped that these would provide commonly understood reference levels on how to describe learning, from basic skills up to the doctorate level. The aspiration was to have all stakeholders communicating seamlessly in terms of what a citizen can actually do, at the end of their particular period of learning.

3. Research Aims

Despite the rhetoric from the different ministerial meetings and the reports of the Bologna Follow-Up Group and EURYDICE, implementation of reform through the Bologna Process has been more challenging than was originally thought. This is primarily due to issues related to engaging the academic community, the widespread dissemination of information, a lack of support including low levels of funding available and enlargement of the EU. Significant increases in investment in higher education for reform purposes have not been forthcoming, As a result there remains considerable scepticism about improving the efficiency and quality of higher education under Bologna and the relevance of the Lisbon objectives in establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010.

The purpose of this research is therefore three-fold:

- a) to report on the perceived progress that has been towards achieving Bologna goals and implementing reforms in higher education.
- b) to focus on the ways that Bologna is impacting on individuals, departments, faculties and institutions
- c) to extrapolate findings to examine how countries have responded to Bologna.

4. Data gathering

Evaluation of Bologna progress has predominantly been undertaken at national level, based primarily on Ministry of Education data. An example of this is the regular review of the goals and achievements of Bologna have regularly reported on by EURYDICE, the information network for gathering, monitoring, processing and circulating reliable and readily comparable information on education systems and policies throughout Europe (EURYDICE, 2000, 2004, 2007). These reports provide summary information on national trends in higher education.

In contrast, there appears to have been little research reporting the impact and perceptions of Bologna based on the perspectives of an academic discipline. Information has generally not been derived from the individuals and organisations actually implementing the reforms. The likely reason for this is because inside the European Community each Member State, through the principle of subsidiarity, remains accountable for the organisation and content of its education and the vocational training systems. Hence, the responsibility for higher education and reporting lies in each of the Member States either at the national level or else regionally.

Data for this research was gathered through a short questionnaire which focussed on the nine goals of the Bologna Declaration and the development of a European Higher Education Area. It was administered to Departments of Geography via the HERODOT network. HERODOT is the Socrates Thematic Network for Geography in higher education, which has been active since 2002 and has more than 240 member organisations (Donert, 2003).

A draft questionnaire was devised by the coordinator and tested on a small sample of participants at the Liverpool network conference in September 2008. Based on the results of this pilot, revisions were made to finalise the survey (Appendix 1). Network members were then emailed the final questionnaire on four occasions in May and June 2009. Completed surveys for this report were returned to the network coordinator by July 31st 2009.

Respondents were asked, via a series of open ended questions, to describe the ways that the Bologna Process was impacting on them individually and at departmental and/or Faculty level. The themes covered by the questionnaire were the nine goals of the Bologna Declaration and the development of the European Higher Education Area. In order to clarify main issues, further email and telephone correspondence was conducted with those respondents that agreed to be contacted.

The results from individual institutional responses were classified based on whether the Bologna objectives were being addressed or not. Responses were totalled and presented graphically. The results were summed to represent country responses. Where there was disagreement between answers or the responses were vague or uncertain, the specific respondents were contacted and clarification concerning their replies obtained.

5. Survey Results

5.1 Survey sample

A total of 65 responses were received from different higher education institutions who were members of the HERODOT Thematic Network. In total, they represented replies from 19 European countries. Four responses were received from countries outside the European education zone (Socrates-eligible countries). The results from these have not been included in this report.

5.2 Survey results

The summary survey results are presented in Figures 5.1 and 5.2.

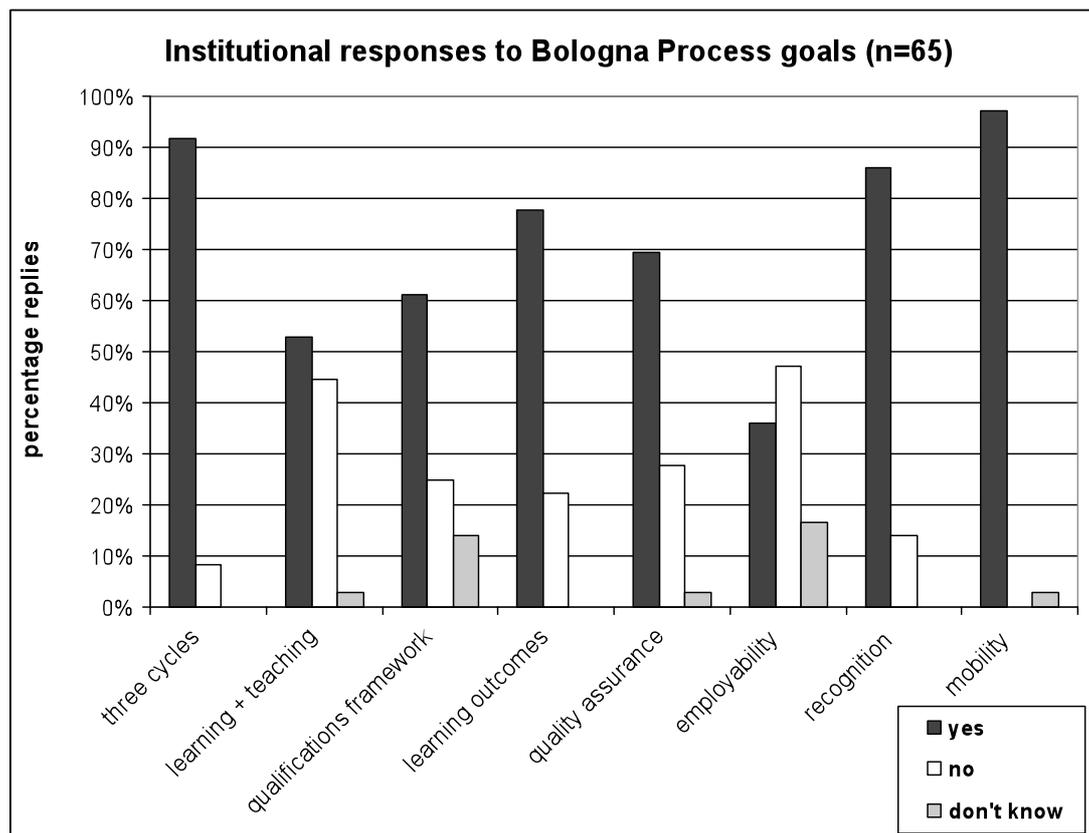


Figure 5.1 Responses by institutions (n=65)

According to EURYDICE, in 2007 the majority of countries continued to be in a Bologna implementation phase, where significant developments were still being undertaken (EURYDICE, 2007). This ongoing situation has been confirmed by data gathered during this research.

Figure 5.1 indicates that in 2009 more than half of the Bologna objectives were being met in the majority of cases. Nearly all the replies indicated that three cycles were being used and that the mobility of staff and students was implemented, predominantly through the Socrates Erasmus programme. Qualifications from other countries were being recognised and most institutions were developing courses using learning outcomes. Some aspects of quality assurance were being used in most organisations.

According to the responses, several Bologna goals were not yet being addressed by many institutions. In particular, there appeared to be little being done to improve the employability of graduates or the quality of learning and teaching under Bologna developments.

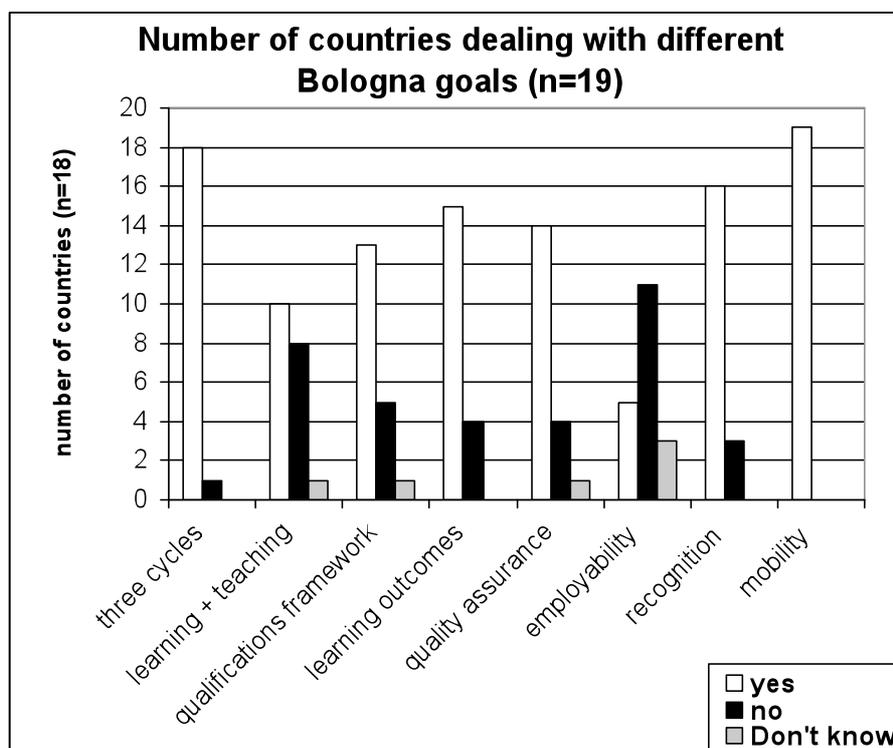


Figure 5.2 Bologna responses by country

When the data was agglomerated by country for the eight Bologna goals, the actions of the different nations varied significantly in their degree of Bologna implementation (Figure 5.3). Only Ireland and the UK showed complete implementation of all the Bologna goals, largely because their higher

education systems have traditionally been closely allied to the North American model on which Bologna developments have been based. Greece, Hungary and Slovenia appeared to have the lowest implementation rates.

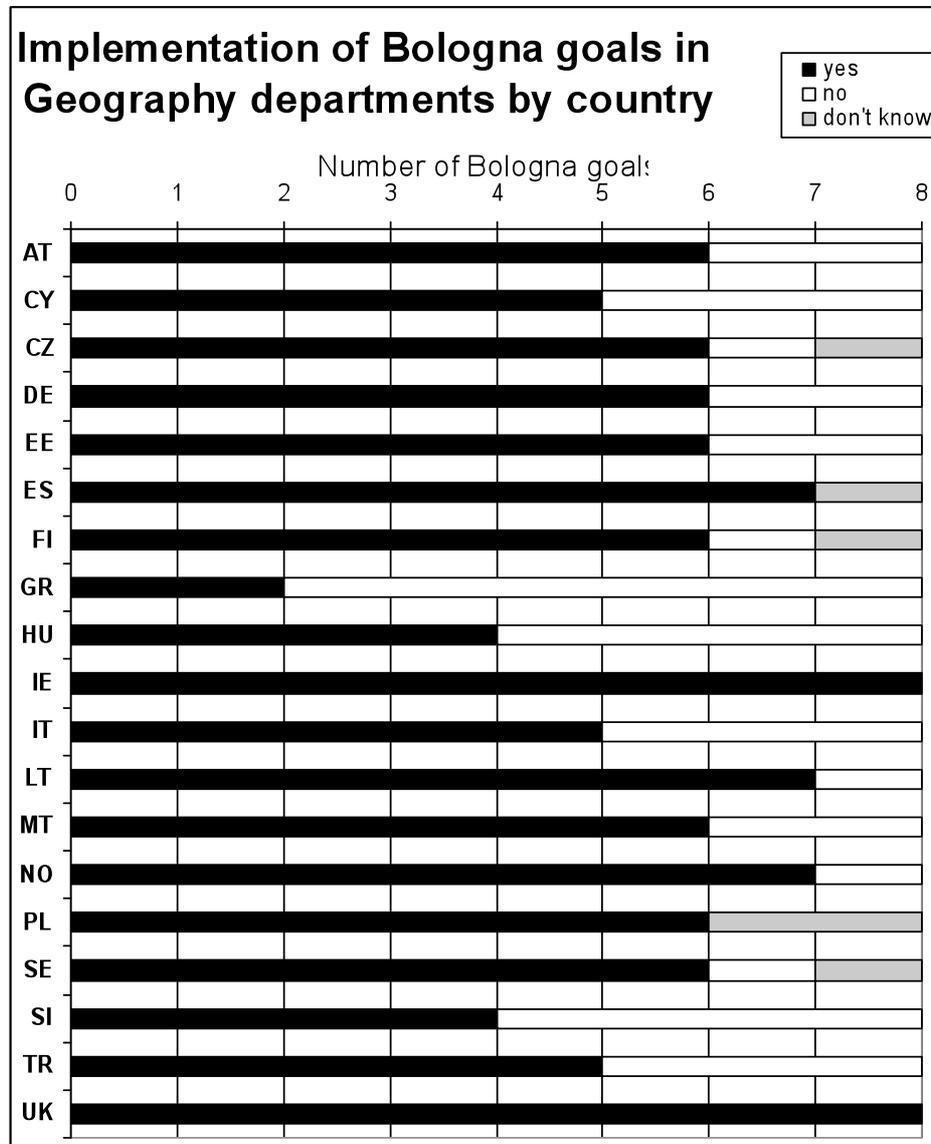


Figure 5.3: Bologna implementation, by country

In recent years, the European Union has placed great emphasis on the economic aspects of education policy, expressly politicising views that Europe's economic and social development will only be advanced through fostering an innovative, knowledge and information based society. Universities are said to have had a particularly important role to play in creating this Europe of knowledge. This gives them a political voice as

Governmental decisions are being increasingly shaped by academic input. It has been widely suggested that universities contribute greatly to strengthening the competitiveness of the European economy in a Europe of knowledge (Commission of the European Communities, 2003a). During the Bologna process, reforms based on this philosophy have been questioned in several countries and especially in the case of Greece, where strikes led to long-term university closures and the decisions taken by the professional associations representing academics not to implement aspects of Bologna.

6. Discussion and Analysis

According to Vivienne Reding (2003), European higher education was expected to accept all the objectives established by the Bologna Declaration. These goals were:

- adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adoption of a system based on two main cycles
- establishment of a system of credits
- promotion of mobility
- promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
- promotion of the European dimension in higher education
- introduction of lifelong learning
- involving higher education institutions and students in the process, and
- promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

The survey results of Geography departments indicated that the Bologna Process has had a significant impact on the work of universities and teacher training institutions. It was confirmed that most of the countries involved in the survey had implemented at least three main aspects of the Bologna process (the three-cycle structure, mobility, credit transfer and the use of learning outcomes). However many gaps in implementation still existed.

The Bologna goals are now dealt with in turn.

a) three-cycle structure (e.g. bachelor-masters-doctorate)

The instrument that has had the most impact on departments has been the adoption of a 'common degree structure'. Since the Berlin follow up meeting in 2003 this common degree structure has been commonly described as a three-cycle structure (bachelors, masters, doctorate).

The survey results confirmed that a common degree structure was in place in almost all the institutions. Earlier arrangements had been amended to fit the Bologna model. However, almost half of the respondents commented that they were still in a transitional phase, whereby new legislation had been passed but that these reforms were being implemented in stages. In several

cases, new Bologna structures were operating in parallel with earlier systems for the next 1 or 2 years (CZ, DE, IT, SE, PL). Agreeing the structure of doctoral studies was proving to be an issue, especially relating to “Habilitation”.

The Bologna Declaration does not impose a precise structure. The length of the different degree cycle components varied, 3+2+4, 4+2+3 and 4+2+4 were commonly stated. In particular, the length of the Bachelors cycle and the context of Masters level developments were frequently criticised.

“The three-year BSc programme gives very limited training The Master qualification in 3+2 system is a more specialist diploma degree”

“The equivalence of degrees is a problem. Qualifications from the “old” system will then have to be determined for many years and decades to come, which may sometimes have negative consequences for the students, e. g. requiring that they have to do complementary courses before they may be admitted to the Masters course.”

“The Masters degree is not a scientific degree.”

b) quality issues

i) quality of learning and teaching

Bologna seeks to make all universities improve the quality of learning and teaching and to make them more effective (Corbett, 2005). A main task is to create relevant courses and improving the quality of learning and teaching is therefore of fundamental importance. This implies that appropriate methods of learning and teaching should be developed with systems and structures to monitor, evaluate and support teaching.

The respondents demonstrated considerable confusion between the processes of quality assurance (QA) and the professional support mechanisms which would be needed to help improve the quality of learning and teaching in courses. QA measures were often mentioned in the responses, rather than support systems:

“Through procedures such as -annual self-assessment by staff evaluated by Chairs of Departments and Deans of Schools, student evaluation of staff at the end of each semester for each course taught; this evaluation is used by the instructor for self-improvement purposes and is included in the self-assessment documentation each year”

“There is a designated learning and teaching officer and committee, with all departments represented. T&L forms a central strand in Quality Assurance operated in all departments.”

“We have a Teaching and Learning Committees at both School and Faculty level. We also have external examiners at all three stages in the Bologna cycle.”

Following further research, this was mainly because in only a few cases did institutions have mechanisms for quality support and enhancement in place. The professional development of academic and support staff was largely non-existent. This confirmed the relatively weak response to this aspect of Bologna in the questionnaire results and therefore the comparatively low status of learning and teaching in higher education, when compared with research activities.

“In reality, teaching and studying are third-rate activities at university (the first two are to publish ISI papers and to get EU research money”

“No, it is disappointing that the quality of learning and teaching has actually strongly decreased. There is growing pressure on research.

In some institutions, quality measures were only just being introduced

Improving quality is a constant task, which is not so easy achieved. At present very little is made of learning and teaching quality. The reform of Higher Education has been started and a new Law on Higher education was approved in May 2009.

In one case quality enhancement of courses had been in operation for some considerable time and was taking place regardless of Bologna.

Measuring the quality of higher education has been exemplified by the emergence of various measures of performance and in particular the construction of global league tables (Proulx, 2007; Usher and Savino, 2007).

International status is mainly measured in terms of high international student enrolments, research partnerships and publications in leading international journals. International consortia of universities, usually based on similar missions and standards, have been formed. It is thus not surprising that the quality of learning and teaching appears to have a relatively low priority in European higher education.

Five quality aspects of course design in Geography were mentioned by respondents:

- 1) multidisciplinary, with Geography departments being restructured into Faculties of Science, Social Science and Humanities
- 2) systemic, whereby systems approaches are underpinned by skills and techniques like cartography and GIS
- 3) holistic, through which courses examine highly complex issues and dealt with them in a spatially
- 4) individual and flexible, whereby individual interests and specialism in specific geographical fields could be encouraged, particularly at Masters level and
- 5) European, a strong European dimension that included foreign language skills, an understanding of cultural diversity and mobility through exchange (Roosaare *et al.*, 2007).

ii) the use of Quality Assurance

Mutual recognition in the field of quality assurance in higher education is expected across Europe. This calls for the development of clearly defined and commonly accepted systems of evaluation and means of accreditation, with agreed criteria and methodologies. These were being adopted in the majority of institutions.

“Yes. course evaluation is done by students), There is also external curriculum review”

“There are student surveys of each course taught at the end of the semester that provide feedback about the quality of the course.”

“Our quality assurance system includes Teaching Evaluation Matrix, student feedback systems and graduate follow-up. Our quality assurance system was audited in 2008.”

“Partially. The most widely used technique is surveys. Internal control system has also been established.”

In 2005, the Bergen Communiqué stated that almost all countries had made provision for a quality assurance system. To meet this objective, some universities related to external quality evaluation systems.

“The university has been certified with the EFQM - Commitment to Excellence (European Foundation for Quality Management)”

“We have a certificate of quality awarded by an independent board of experts.”

Standards and guidelines on quality assurance made it clear that student participation in the process was very important and that stakeholders such as employers should have an opportunity to give feedback (ENQA, 2005).

“The university has a designated officer and QA committee. All departments are represented.”

“We have External Examiners. Annual Programme Monitoring. Module evaluation by students. National Student Survey”

Regulations stated that internal quality assurance in higher education was compulsory. However the Union of Greek Professors has so far refused to participate in any form of quality assurance.

c) national qualifications frameworks

The Bologna Declaration included creating a coordinated system of quality assurance and accreditation which operates at a European level. This includes creating national qualifications frameworks, and the use of defined learning outcomes to improve the quality of higher education. These goals, though dealt with separately as Bologna goals, are closely connected.

These qualifications frameworks are designed to enhance the visibility, compatibility and credibility of European higher education degrees. The structural changes impact widely on course curricula and the qualifications.

Most respondents were not aware of NQFs or else confused them with school national curricula, teacher training competences or international systems of performance evaluation.

“Yes. There is a system of laws and regulations. Universities are under international accreditations. University has Statutes Of Academic Degrees. But professional qualifications are neither established nor defined: for example, what qualifications should have a person having “MSc in geography” is partly determined by learning outcomes of compulsory courses and partly it is quite free, depending on students’ interests.”

“Not yet, but universities has been evaluated in World wide qualifications frameworks. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities by Shanghai Jiao Tong University (2003, 2004, 2005).“

d) using defined learning outcomes

At departmental level, promoting student-centred learning should be at the core of Bologna activity. Some responses indicated that learning outcomes were a requirement in the course development process for all three cycles. The use of ECTS was frequently mentioned. Most respondents reported that their courses were using or were going to use learning outcomes to define course credits and syllabi.

Clearly defined learning outcomes have been, or perhaps should have been, identified since many years, although in reality the practice varies a lot between universities and disciplines. All courses should be given both in the “old” system as well as in corresponding ECTS terms.

Currently only some schools and departments are. However the university is working very intensively to have all the programs to do so.

In some cases it was recognised that introducing meaningful learning outcomes in curricular design formed the basis of improving the quality of learning and teaching processes.

“Generally we can say that the new courses are more practical, than before. New subject topics focus more on the useful application of knowledge, and not lexical knowledge.”

Reference was also made to official documents such as “Studienordnung” in Germany and even to international standards where the skills and competences of graduates were being formally defined.

“There are official documents such as the “Studienordnung” (study guidelines) or “Prüfungsordnung” (examination guidelines), as well as guidelines for the PhD and Habilitation program. These vary considerably with regard to how specific they are in defining learning outcomes, with fairly specific for the teacher courses and very general wordings for the PhD and Habilitation programs. Consequently, within the research group for earth observation, expectations for PhD students have been defined and are continuing to be developed.”

In a few cases defined learning outcomes were not being used.

“No there are only personal adaptations to new requirements. We have been asked to do it, but not all courses are doing it.”

e) measures to improve the employability of graduates

Since the Lisbon summit, one aim of the Bologna process has been to meet the challenge of providing a higher education system which presents graduates with access to the labour market and furthers the existence and development of excellence.

The strong connections between Bologna reforms, course development and employability were recognised in some responses.

*“The main goal orientation of the curriculum should be to ensure that bachelors are able to find preliminary professional working place in order to continue their deeper specialization in eligible direction, as a rule, in a Master programme.**

Under Bologna, higher education needs to be particularly concerned about the needs of its graduates entering the labour market. Cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises need to be improved through collaboration with employers. Despite this, in only a few replies were

examples provided concerning how the employability of graduates was being enhanced.

“Compulsory internships. Soft skills as obligatory subjects. Industry relations. Jobs database”

“Students do practical training as field studies or as work in companies or labs (e.g. for planning and mapmaking). Such a practical training gives students a first acquaintance with possible challenges in their future jobsites.”

“Students during their studies have obligatory practical training in companies”.

Innovative teaching and learning systems need to play an important role in establishing curricula for employability. Hence the challenge of delivering professional and academic qualifications has to be addressed. This was only mentioned on two responses.

“We try to change curriculum in order to involve more disciplines devoted for practical use. We involve persons related to possible working places of our students in study process.”

“We have two compulsory Geography modules devoted to employability and careers education”.

Most respondents did not consider that the relationships with business and enterprise were part of their ‘normal academic’ activities. Therefore, employability remains a Bologna goal which was not yet being addressed in the majority of departments and universities.

f) foreign degree recognition

According to the European Commission (2005b), Europe needs strong and creative universities if access and participation are to be widened and the potential of lifelong learning is to be realised through quality and excellence in teaching, learning, research and innovation activities. Foreign degree recognition is one aspect of this widening participation.

In general it appeared that foreign qualifications were being recognised for entry to many institutions and that there were institutional systems in place.

“Yes. It is the responsibility of the national ENIC/NARIC (Academic Recognition Information Centre), which is a subdivision of Foundation Archimedes and belongs to the international networks of ENIC and NARIC. Another system we have is APEL = Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning”

The adoption of foreign degree recognition aims to increase their competitiveness in the recruitment of fee-paying international students. Several respondents commented however, that although there was a system in place, it was not in use because most courses were only being taught in the native language.

“Yes, we do. Although we have no courses in foreign language at the moment (in geography) so there are few persons interested from other countries.”

““Yes, “equivalence” (the term used by the National Agency for Higher Education) may be done for all degrees from European universities as well as for most non-European universities. However, most undergraduate teaching is in our home language!”

Establishing systems that can deal with foreign applicants does not address the necessity to increase the competitive nature of higher education. Set in a global context, this is an extremely complex and challenging issue to tackle.

g) mobility of students, graduates and higher education staff

With the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, under the Berlin Communiqué ECTS became a credit accumulation system and therefore one of the central elements in the process of making the structure of European higher education more consistent through mobility for students and academic staff. It has been made obligatory by law and has been fully implemented in most countries (EURYDICE, 2007). A Diploma Supplement was being incorporated in most countries through the academic and professional recognition of qualifications. This makes the acquired knowledge and abilities more transparent and understood so that graduates can also be mobile.

Most European higher education institutions are involved in the Socrates programme and according to official records, more than one million students have benefited from mobility and each academic year approximately 12,000

university teachers undertake mobility. As a result of its widespread use, the benefits of the mobility programmes were commonly mentioned.

“The main advantage is of course that Bologna facilitates movements of students between universities and countries.”

“Complaints from some lecturers that “their” work suffers due to Bologna comes mostly from those who have never taken part in international exchange programmes and activities”

Many available mobility and scholarship schemes were recognised, but occasionally with considerable scepticism.

“Yes, through programs like Erasmus, Tempus, CEEPUS, Fulbright and others, for students many scholarships and mobility schemas exist. Sometimes more, than we have good candidates.”

“Formal frameworks fully exist, but in practise there is few or none diversity of choose – due to the rigid bureaucratic system”

Internal systems supporting the mobility of students and staff were mentioned. Including specific instruments developed to promote mobility and achieve Bologna goals.

“Yes, very much. Seminars are given, their credits are recognized, and information is provided.”

“Yes, there is a full time Erasmus Officer employed by the University responsible for disseminating information and arranging all procedures for student and staff exchanges including ECTS and Diploma Supplement.”

Borderless education is a core function of Europeanisation. Student and staff mobility has been encouraged for many years such that it has become a widely accepted as a regular part of European higher education. Now it is being used to enable Bologna goals.

h) creation of a European Higher Education Area

With the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, European Ministries of Education agreed on a framework within which a common higher education agenda could be set (Teichler, 1999) and a European Higher Education Area

(EHEA) established by 2010. This is therefore a primary objective of the Bologna Process.

Considering the fact that higher education institutions have been given the mission of meeting the target to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010, it is important that universities are aware of and accurately understand the implications of this expectation.

There were several different interpretations of the meaning of “European Higher Education Area”, Unity was a dominant factor through the use of terms like “*homogenisation*”, “*compatibility*” and “*commonality*”.

“The Bologna approach should be oriented towards unity and not uniformity,”

“comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe”

“The area over which it is intended (via Bologna) to encourage commonality of QA procedures and standards.”

There was also some confusion concerning the importance of diversity.

The best ideal result would have been homogeneity among universities in Europe, but this has not been obtained.

Free movement and internationalisation were other main themes picked up in the replies:

“The area where students and teachers could move free. Differences of curricula and legal barriers do not disturb this movement.”

“to stimulate the mobility of experts/knowledge; exchange of experiences, materials, practise, ...”

“I consider it as a good objective which will enable us to internationalize and share know-how and learning cultures with other HEIs in Europe. It will provide the students plenty of chances to do their degrees in different HEIs in Europe. The graduates will have common qualifications when they seek for work in the European labour markets. The unification of degree qualifications and improvement of teaching quality are among the best contents of the EHEA once it will be established.”

Some replies only focussed on the difficulties of the EHEA and possible threats involved from the diversity of cultures and systems:

“I think this is generally a very good idea, the goals are good, but we are only at the first steps at the moment, and we will only see the benefits of this process in the future. Not too easy to build up the same Higher Education System, because of there are huge differences between the traditions of education in national level the involved countries.”

“Of benefit to the student and academic community, as long as each university’s autonomy is not compromised and standardisation does not become an end in itself.”

Only one response demonstrated detailed awareness and understanding of the main issues involved.

“Such a united area is a goal for the Bologna process. So far – there are different countries with different cultures, educational and employment positions. Probably this construction (European Higher Education Area) will have multi-level hierarchical structure, where at the highest level are top academic institutions (European “Harvard”, “MIT”, “Stanford” etc). Somewhere in this hierarchy are typical average European universities (courses in native language, main orientation to local labour market) and somewhere will be the increasing number of virtual universities (offering popular business-based fixed-orientation courses and using well-paid staff from different countries). Europe is competing with the USA for good students and the results are not clear yet.”

Comprehensive international co-operation should be enabled by developments undertaken through the Bologna process. The EHEA therefore has developed an external dimension, whereby universities are encouraged to establish international partnerships. This dimension was absent from the responses to the survey.

It was not surprising however that confusion, uncertainty and ignorance concerning the EHEA was common, especially when there has been so much debate and many differences expressed even among European institutions. For instance, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education suggest it should primarily be concerned with a qualifications framework, employability, applied research, widening accessibility, the social dimension

and building international partnerships (EURASHE, 2005). On the other hand, the Council of Europe (2005) proposed that the EHEA should have much broader objectives, whereby education for Europe should incorporate the principles of human rights, democracy, tolerance and mutual respect, the rule of law and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

j) other Bologna Process comments

A few other comments related to Bologna were also raised in the replies. For example the importance of international competitiveness in setting the overall goal to make Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010.

“The process is far too slow to compete with for example the US. If we move slowly we are overtaken by others. Sad but true.”

The role of the university in terms of research and innovation activities was also considered important in a Bologna context.

“A university is first of all a scientific institution characterized by creative atmosphere and synergy of personal communication between academics and scholars (masters, fellows and prentices) of different disciplines.”

Bologna was also interpreted in terms of transforming the governance of institutions and specifically the structures affecting the place of subject departments.

“Bologna has created organizational changes in the university. A huge faculty of science was established, the Department of Geography is now part of the Institute of Ecology and Earth Sciences,”

Anomalies, uncertainty and complexity were also expressed.

“There still seem to be some anomalies:- for example 2 year degrees, Same year Masters (eg, M.Eng) and typically one year Masters (rather than two)”

“It is a complex, in some sense inconsistent process”

“It is a ‘process’ and will take time, if it can work and be enhanced by the Lisbon framework.”

Finally, the significance of the work of the HERODOT network in supporting the Bologna process was also commented upon.

“Associations and networks such as HERODOT in Geography are central to moving from the theory of Bologna to the awareness and implementation of it.”

7. Conclusions and recommendations

In 2003 Vivienne Reding indicated that the countries engaged with the Bologna Process have to fully implement the Bologna process or European higher education would be weaker and even more disorganised than before (Reding, 2003). With the exception of Greece, this research suggests that higher education in different countries appears to have, by and large, actively participated in the reforms. Institutions appear to have taken major efforts to implement or prepare to put into action different aspects of the Bologna process.

This study has illustrated however that there is a great deal of heterogeneity in the characteristics of Bologna implementation in European higher education. There were significant differences between nations and much variety also within countries. This is because higher education institutions do not react in the same way and at the same pace to changes which affect them and that this is reflected on in the pace and style of Bologna implementation.

In some cases Bologna appeared to have had significant impacts on the ways that universities, departments and individuals operate, while in others it concerned only small-scale effects and more cosmetic changes. In the latter examples, it appeared that change was being encouraged but it was frequently associated with converting existing approaches and activities rather than holistic Bologna implementation.

The organisational context of the Bologna process establishes the framework and settings within which improvements in higher education were planned to take place. However, it is obvious that top-down reforms alone would not be sufficient to assimilate Bologna goals into higher education (EUA, 2004). The main issue for its success is how to ensure that progress can become fully integrated at institutional, faculty and departmental levels, so that it can become self-sustaining.

This research showed that knowledge and information about Bologna was not well developed at the local scale. The responses showed a mixture of

confusion about, enthusiasm towards and criticism of the changes taking place as a result of the Bologna process. This confirms the results of research by King (2006), who reported how apparent misunderstandings and controversy had built walls rather than bridges to change, by raising too many challenges and marginalising stakeholder groups, like the academics, who are at the centre of the transformation process. This aspect needs to be addressed.

Gonzales and Wagenar (2003) advocated the importance of reflection on and research into the impacts of Bologna, but so far there still appears to have predominantly been a focus on structures and systems and not on courses and people. Additional research into the curricular transformations needs to be done. They also recommended that more specialised engagement with the Bologna process ought to be placed in the hands of the disciplines and subject networks like HERODOT and professional associations such as EUROGEO. In education, professional communities have been shown to help create a context for collective engagement as they allow sustained collaborative and coordinated efforts. Academics are likely to go in search of professional communities in which they can find things to share. Disciplinary frameworks have proved over time to be a powerful approach to professionalisation in higher education, where practitioners work together as a community undertaking activities which are based on common needs. They should therefore be encouraged by the European Commission to act as change agents and be the main vehicle for raising quality across Europe.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Bologna Survey Questionnaire

Bologna Process: What does it mean for you?

Your Name		Country	
Organisation		Email	

Please describe what is happening in your department/Faculty concerning the Bologna Process under these headings:

Is there a three-cycle structure (e.g. bachelor-masters-doctorate)? Please describe.

improving the quality of learning and teaching

Do national qualifications frameworks exist in your country?

Are you working with defined learning outcomes for each of the three cycles?

Are you using quality assurance? (What does it include for you?)

How is the employability of your graduates being improved?

Do you recognise foreign degrees and qualifications for entry to courses?

Is the mobility of students, graduates and higher education staff encouraged? How?

What do you think is the European Higher Education Area?

Please add any other Bologna Process comments

Please return this form to: Karl Donert (donertk@hope.ac.uk)