

EUA policy position: The future of the Bologna Process post 2010

I. Preamble: A Strong and Ambitious Vision for the Future

EUA believes that a coherent, transparent and outstanding university sector is essential for the cultural, economic and social development of Europe. Autonomous and well-funded universities in a diversified system, but with shared objectives and values, will be key drivers in achieving Europe's goals.

For universities to realise this potential they will increasingly have to link their core missions in higher education, research and innovation, not least in order to be able to respond to public demand for universities, and to contribute substantially to finding answers to global problems such as renewable energies, sustainable development or climate change.

This requires open, modern and flexible universities, with a strong European dimension, characterised by true European mobility and European careers, as well as engagement at global level. As a sector European universities need to be attractive to both European and international students that can contribute to and benefit from the rich and diversified European scientific and scholarly tradition.

II. Consolidation, communication and optimisation of existing reforms

The achievements of the Bologna process have to be consolidated and their sustainability at national and institutional level ensured within a coherent European framework. In particular the ongoing process of curricular renewal needs to be continued in universities across Europe.

In other words careful attention must be given to following up 'unfinished business' to ensure that the qualitative changes required are embedded in institutional and also subject specific cultures. It is crucial to avoid the risk of achieving only superficial structural change across Europe. Moreover, in pursuing the common goal of a major shift to student centred learning, linking qualifications and credits with the introduction of learning outcomes, the ongoing reform process needs to take account of different disciplinary cultures and also address the need for reform in 'difficult areas' such as teacher training, medicine or in other regulated professions.

A survey of national Rectors' Conferences and university associations across Europe indicates that the following topics need particular attention:

- The proper implementation of ECTS & the introduction of modules;
- Consolidating the basic framework conditions for joint and double degrees;
- Improving recognition of prior learning, study periods and degrees;
- Ensuring that newly introduced bachelor and Master programme are sufficiently flexible to allow for student mobility as well as removing obstacles to mobility both of students and staff (e.g. portability of grants and pensions etc.);
- The introduction of national QFs and the tuning of QFs between systems and at different levels;
- Pursuing the discussion on employability – with special emphasis on the role of the bachelor on the labour market – while also balancing employability goals with the other purposes of HE.

III. Future priorities – advancing Bologna

EUA proposes four major objectives and related action lines as priorities for advancing the European Higher Education Area post 2010. Many of the specific issues raised have in some way been addressed over the last ten years. The intention is to set new objectives, as well as reconsidering existing priorities in the light of the new challenges facing European higher education. It is important to focus on a small number of common goals, and for each objective to consider action lines required to address the particular challenge as well as specific measures that are relevant for universities and can be addressed by all partners, at European, national and institutional level.

1. Consolidating Europe’s broad base of research based higher education: Reaffirming the essential link between higher education and research as a hallmark of European higher education and a determining factor of the competitiveness of Europe and European universities in the future. **This in turn requires connecting more closely the European Higher Education and Research Areas.** Success in bringing these two processes closer together will enhance the attractiveness of European higher education and strengthen considerably the European dimension. This requires:

- a. encouraging universities to develop further their own specific and increasingly varied research and innovation profiles in line with their own (increasingly differentiated) missions;
- b. maintaining the momentum in the ongoing reform of doctoral education
- c. developing better career opportunities for young researchers
- d. removing obstacles to mobility and overcoming national fragmentation so as to promote Europe wide opportunities for teachers and researchers at all stages in their careers (career structures, recruitment, pension rights, visa issues, link to charter & code etc...)

2. Providing more education to more people: responsive and flexible universities: ensuring that at least 50% of each age cohort has access to high education. This requires:

- a. a new pact/consensus on lifelong learning based upon the commitments made in the Lifelong Learning Charter for Europe’s universities – in order to address the needs of an ever more diverse student population (flexibility of learning paths, recognition of informal learning, customising the educational offer etc.
- b. increasing the permeability of systems by addressing related social questions (tuition fees, benefits, study grants/other financial aid)
- c. improving understanding and making better use of diversity (at institutional and programme level and in respect of the student body, while also taking account of the requirements of, and the demand for different disciplines, and the need to develop interdisciplinarity)

3. Redefining public responsibility: the new challenges facing higher education, along with the increased autonomy that allows universities to respond better to societal demands, means that the role of the state and the relationship between public responsibility and institutional autonomy needs to be reconsidered in respect of:

- a. responsibility for quality,
- b. appropriate and sustainable funding,
- c. governance issues,
- d. the growth of private providers & the need for coherent systems of HE,
- e. the need to strive for parity of esteem by promoting excellence in relation to a variety of different institutional missions.

4. Fit to face global challenges: The global engagement of the European Higher Education Area and the way in which European universities cooperate and compete on the global stage is a cross cutting priority that will be of major importance in the next decade. This requires:

- a. promoting 'European' internationalisation by considering incentives for enhancing the internationalisation of European universities based upon the Bologna tools and instruments developed over the last decade,
- b. strengthening degree mobility, in particular at master and doctoral level while maintaining existing levels of mobility within degree programmes;
- c. improving understanding of the relationship between the European and the global dimension by analysing:
 - where local, national, European and international agendas are becoming blurred (e.g. in research, with the global competition for researchers, which impacts on doctoral programmes, or in relation to transnational education, with Europe as both a provider and a consumer);
 - the extent to which the international dimension will grow in importance in the future, including: an analysis of the macroeconomic benefits of higher education, of the impact on national and institutional strategies, and of the need for more coherent policies and frameworks at European level.

IV. Managing the process

There is a consensus that structured dialogue is necessary also in the future as it allows the mobilisation of all players in the interests of all; and that policy coordination and setting common goals will also be necessary in the future to meet new challenges.

Thus, it is the view of EUA that the maintenance of the present BFUG structure is important to accompany the next, more qualitative phase of the reforms but also to ensure that the present reforms are implemented in a sustainable manner and do not 'run out of steam.'

The momentum of the follow-up structure created over the last decade, and involving all stakeholders should not be lost. It has provided opportunities for universities, through EUA, to take a leading role in policy development, and this should be built upon in the future with the goal of shifting coordination of the implementation of reforms increasingly to the universities.

Brussels, October 2008