

Press release: Thursday 23rd April 2009



New study maps development and future of Master programmes in Europe

A new study published today by the European University Association (EUA) gives a detailed overview of the development of Master degrees in Europe. Based on a wide-ranging survey of European students, universities (leaders and academics) and employers - it specifically looks at how Master programmes in Europe have developed a decade after the Bologna process was launched. As a result of Bologna, the overall degree structure of many European countries has been fundamentally changed with the implementation of three degree cycles (bachelor, master and doctorate) that are defined in terms of learning outcomes and credit ranges. The results of the study show that a Bologna master 'template' is developing across Europe albeit in three distinctive forms of course provision; taught masters with a strong professional development application; the research intensive master which functions as a pre doctoral degree; and courses delivered to learners returning to education from the workplace.

While nearly all 46 of the Bologna signatory countries have implemented a master cycle into their national higher education systems, the study shows that there is still much work to be done in terms of making the Master cycle more transparent and readable across national borders – to help facilitate recognition of degrees, mobility and exchanges between institutions.

Report author Howard Davies explains: "After a decade of Bologna, the 'European Master' and its variants are well established in European higher education – and it is recognisable at least to professionals, agencies, institutions and governments active in higher education. But it has yet to be fully implemented and still to achieve a stable European profile in terms of pedagogy, labour market profile, its role in research, and in terms of funding and finance."

The new EUA report provides a detailed mapping of the Master degrees in Europe – including a country by country overview of the how countries have adopted the master cycle into their national higher education systems and how students enter the 2nd cycle. It also shows how the Bologna Process has been enshrined in national legislations. The study concludes that no one system has been aligned with Bologna long enough for it to be embedded but instead systems are in varying degrees of transition.

EUA's study also addresses the issue of student mobility. The author concludes that the Masters degree will play a crucial role in the future, particularly as vertical mobility (students completing the bachelor in one country and the master in another) will certainly grow, as has been the case notably in the UK. However, the report also highlights that there are still too many barriers to all types of mobility (within programmes and between degree cycles) – notably due to difficulties in terms of recognition of prior learning and qualifications. The author also explains that mobility instruments – including the diploma supplement - have yet to reach a point where they are routinely used by employers and institutions.

According to the study, the Master is the most 'marketised' of the three degree cycles despite a wide diversity in terms of how students have access to Master programmes, and in terms of tuition fees. Looking to the future, the report predicts that the number of Master programmes will continue to grow – particularly in terms of English-taught programmes and joint degrees.

It also stresses that the provision of Master programmes needs to be more flexible, if it is to satisfy labour market needs, and underlines that employers in particular need to be more involved in curriculum development. The author is positive, however, that the European master will become more readable as national qualification frameworks are gradually put in place. "As the Master provision becomes more flexible and integrated into national systems, it will help develop the high level of skills required by Europe to respond to the current economic crisis," adds Howard Davies.

The results of EUA's work will be presented to the 46 ministers of education who will attend the Bologna Process Ministerial Summit in Belgium on 28/29 April.

A full copy of the report is available on the EUA website: www.eua.be

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

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