

bologna process

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1. Main achievements since Berlin

1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms

After the Berlin conference the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture decided to establish a National Bologna follow-up group to formalize and strengthen the implementation of the Bologna process in Iceland. The group monitors the progress of the Bologna process, gives input and makes proposals for possible actions concerning legislative reform and regulations in order to secure successful implementation of the process.

In co-operation with the Bologna follow-up group and the working group for the promotion of ECTS and Diploma Supplements (DS) an action plan for the introduction of the DS was decided upon. In spring 2004 five HEIs issued DS to all graduates. The remaining HEIs plan to implement DS before spring 2005.

In 2004 the Ministry of Education established a special committee on quality in the education sector. The mission of the committee is to map the situation concerning quality issues at all educational levels. For the HE level the Bologna process will be at the forefront of the work.

2. National organisation

2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies (For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

The Icelandic parliament lays the legislative framework of the education system. Higher education comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The Universities Act enacted in 1997 establishes the general framework for activities of HEIs.

Seven HEIs operate on the basis of the Universities Act, under the auspices of the Ministry of

Education. There is also special legislation for public HEIs and structural charters for private HEIs. The Ministry of Education signs performance-related contracts with all HEIs that come under its administration.

Two HEIs come under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Agricultural Education Act enacted in 1999 establishes the framework for the activities of these institutions.

The Rectors' Council is a collegial body comprising all rectors of HEIs. The Council is appointed on the basis of the Universities Act and is comprised of the university rectors. The Council meets regularly and discusses issues concerning the HE level.

In Iceland there is no single representative body for university students at the national level. However, there is a representative body for university students studying abroad (SÍNE) and a representative body for students studying in specialised schools (BÍSN). In addition, each HEI has their own student body, for example the Student Council of the University of Iceland (SHI). BÍSN and SHI work closely together and participate in the Nordic student association NOM (Nordiskt Ordförande Möte) and the European association ESIB (National Unions of Students in Europe).

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure

(For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

Nine HEIs are operated in Iceland, among them three private institutions.

In the autumn of 2003 there were 15,170 students attending HEIs.

In public HEIs: 13,191 or 87% of the student population.

In private HEIs: 1,979 or 13% of the student population.

The Universities Act applies to all HEIs under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, except the article on administration for public HEIs.

Detailed regulations and laws on the activities of each HEI are further defined in separate acts, regulations and charters.

2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country

(National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture oversees the implementation of the Bologna process. To this end the Ministry of Education in 2003 appointed a national Bologna follow-up group to co-ordinate and conduct the process and to provide input and make proposals for possible legislative reforms and regulations in order to ensure successful implementation of the process. The group consists of representatives from the Ministry, all the HEIs and the student organisations.

The Bologna follow-up group has the task of co-ordinating the activities of the Bologna Promoters, including designing a website and holding a conference for Bologna stakeholders

in March 2005. Visits are being planned to each HEI to introduce the Bologna process.

3. Quality assurance

The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the supervision of education in Iceland. For that purpose the Division of Evaluation and Supervision was established in 1996 within the Ministry.

General provisions for the assurance of quality in higher education are laid down in the Universities Act of 1997 and in Regulations from 1999 revised in 2003 that were set on the basis of the Act. According to the Regulations it is the responsibility of each HEI to set up a formal internal quality control system. The Regulations also state that the Ministry of Education can take the initiative to conduct external evaluations of defined units within the institutions or of the institutions as a whole. For this task an external, independent panel of specialists is appointed to implement the evaluation. The Minister of Education determines when an external evaluation shall take place, as stipulated in the Regulations, and what the focus of the evaluation shall be.

3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.

Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.

The Act on Universities sets the general framework for QA in Iceland. In recent years the QA system has mainly focused on external evaluations of specific programmes in one institution or across institutions. Institutional evaluation focusing on administration and management of private institutions has also been conducted. Special Quality Audits are being prepared. The procedure for evaluating programmes at the level of higher education consists of self-evaluation by the institution, a site visit by external experts (including international experts), and the publication of a final report.

The Ministry signs performance-related contracts with all HEIs. Appended to each contract is a list of the degrees that each institution is allowed to offer. If a HEI wants to establish a new programme or degree, this has to be recognized by the Ministry of Education and added to the list. Every two years the Ministry of Education publishes a list of all degrees that are recognised by national authorities.

3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.

Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the planning of external evaluations at the HE level. External evaluations are conducted by independent experts outside the Ministry. International peers are always recruited to the external evaluation committees.

The Ministry of Education participates in the ENQA and INQAHE networks and in NOQA, the Nordic Network of Quality Assurance Agencies.

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

A three-year Action plan (2005-2007) on evaluation on HEIs has been decided upon. The plan stipulates what kind of evaluations and audits will be executed within the time frame. It includes programme evaluations, institutional evaluations and quality audits. As a general rule the Ministry of Education will outsource each evaluation to external experts or/and consulting companies.

4. The two-cycle degree system

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

As a general rule, studies offered at the HE level in Iceland provide instruction leading to the following degrees: a) a bachelor's degree, which normally takes three years, b) a master's degree taking one to two years, and c) a doctoral degree, taking three to four years. Traces of the old professional degree system (Candidatus degrees of 4-6 years) remain; under this system the holder qualifies for a special office or profession in the fields of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

According to an agreement between the University of Iceland and the Ministry of Education the University shall discharge the functions of an information centre (NARIC/ENIC office) under Article 2 of Article IX of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

The duties of Iceland's NARIC/ENIC office are limited to academic recognition, with professional recognition handled by the various ministries. The NARIC/ENIC office does not make binding assessments; it provides guidance or counselling regarding recognition.

Under Article 24 of the Universities Act no. 136/1997, universities are to set regulations on mutual recognition of parts of study programmes. The regulations for recognition of the education offered can usually be found in the regulations of each HEI.

In the case of degrees taken at a university or comparable educational institution elsewhere in the Nordic countries, assessment of such shall be made, where appropriate, in accordance with common Nordic regulations. The framework is based on the Nordic Declaration on the recognition of Qualification concerning HE or the Reyjavík Declaration, signed by Ministers of the Nordic countries in June 2004.

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies

(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

Doctoral programmes are offered in two HEIs. Thus three-cycle studies are offered in several fields of study, where the third cycle lasts 3-4 years. In some fields students have the possibility to enroll in a doctoral programme without having completed an MA/MS degree, but in that case the duration of the doctoral programme is prolonged. The doctoral programmes include coursework, which usually makes up about 15% of the programme.

According to legislation on the University of Iceland the University is empowered to issue a joint or a double degree in co-operation with another University at the doctoral level. Regulations on the duration and form of masters and doctoral degrees are issued for each HEI that has been permitted to grant third level degrees.

6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?

(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

HEIs perform a large part of the research activities in the public sector. HEIs work together with public and private research organizations and companies and participate in international research networks, including EU's Framework Programme, COST, etc. All HEIs receive public funding for different research purposes.

In a recent science and technology policy declaration the government emphasises the importance of research training at the doctoral level in strengthening University research and the role of the Fund for Graduate Education and the role of Universities as research institutions in building up and encouraging diversity in research at Icelandic universities. The government intends to increase competition between individuals and research teams for research grants from expanding competitive funds. The universities, however, receive basic appropriation in order to finance their internal development and to facilitate their competitive edge against other applicants for support from the competitive funds. These funds will double in size until 2007.

In 2001 expenditures for R&D in Iceland amounted to 3.01%. Of this 18.8% was R&D carried out by the HE sector. The public sector financed 80.9% of the R&D carried out by the HE sector; the rest comes from national and international research funds and the private sector.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country *(For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)*

Factors influencing mobility include availability of information and guidance. The personal interest of students and encouragement from teachers also play an important role, and of course grants and transferability of loans are major factors that encourage students to take a part of their study abroad.

The HEIs in Iceland participate in the Nordplus and Erasmus programmes and receive grants for mobility purposes from the EU and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The government of Iceland allocates scholarships to individual students to study Icelandic at the University of Iceland. These funds are allocated each year.

When taking part in mobility programmes Icelandic students can use their student loans without any difficulty.

In Iceland, the number and variety of courses offered in English for foreign exchange students has grown considerably in recent years and is a major factor in encouraging students to come to Iceland to study.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

Icelandic language courses are offered to the foreign exchange students, ILPC courses for Erasmus students in the summer before the actual study period begins, and courses offered as a part of the study programme. Additionally, Icelandic language courses are offered on-line as self-study programmes.

All Icelandic universities offer assistance in finding housing for exchange students. A programme called "Introduction to Iceland" run by the Office of International Education – Socrates National Agency in Iceland (OIE) is offered to all foreign students and professors that come to Iceland. This programme consists of 3-4 events per semester and is a combination of excursions and lectures about the Icelandic matters, culture, society etc.

In most HEIs a student assistance system has been developed. Home students volunteer to assist the incoming student with practical matters upon arrival and introduce him/her to the local community and campus life. This is meant to help the incoming student to adapt to the new environment. Some universities have developed a language assistance programme combined with the student assistance system.

In order to improve the mobility of Icelandic students to other countries regular information meetings are held in each HEI. An international day organised by the OIE is held at the beginning of each year to promote studies abroad and student exchange programmes. OIE's staff attends information meetings at Universities/faculties to inform about study opportunities in other countries and on student exchange programmes. The OIE's staff also attends such meetings in high schools upon request.

The OIE provides assistance to students about different mobility schemes; both by providing general information on the internet, in printed booklets and by assisting individuals in planning their stay in a foreign country.

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)

Financial support is of major importance for the teacher exchanges. Support from the home university/faculty is also important, as well as being sure that the period abroad is evaluated as a part of the teacher's duties at home. Finding a replacement teacher if exchanges can not take place at the same time can sometimes be difficult.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

The HEIs are looking into special measures to increase staff mobility to as well as from the country. The main issues will be to improve the information and assistance provided for visiting staff members on their arrival. Special language courses for teachers will be offered.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions

Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

The HE system has been moving towards decentralisation, both with regard to responsibilities and decision making. According to the Universities Act, universities shall be independent institutions under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The administrators of each institution can decide on the organization of instruction, study and evaluation as well as staffing and arrangements for research. The administration of public HEIs is entrusted to the university councils, rector, faculty meetings, faculty councils and deans, if the university is divided into faculties. A university council is the supreme decision-making body in each institution unless otherwise provided for expressly in the Act or in the special Act applicable to each university. Each university receives funding from the State budget. Each university has full autonomy to determine the use of the funds allocated by the government.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

The lines of administrative authority are laid out in the Universities Act. Academic staff, students and independent members are represented on the University Council of each public university. The Council has the final say on university concerns, works on developing and strengthening the institution, and sets future policy.

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?

(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

According to the Universities Act students have representatives on the university councils of public universities. Students participate in university forums, faculty meetings and department meetings according to special laws and regulations set for each particular public university. Students are not represented on councils of private HEIs; however each of these universities has an active student organization. Student organizations have representatives in the Icelandic Bologna follow-up group, both from public and private HEIs.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

HEIs are responsible for selecting students for admission. According to the Universities Act students entering a HEI are required to have passed the state matriculation examination, have finished other equivalent education or have, in the view of the HEI in question, acquired equivalent maturity or knowledge. All students attending HEI are eligible for student loans

from the Icelandic Student Loan Fund.

According to the Universities Act access to public HEIs is free of charge apart from registration fees. Private institutions charge tuition fees. The payments are made directly to the HEI in question and are credit rated by the Student Loan Fund.

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

All HEIs run institutes that offer courses in continuing education, and distance learning courses are widely available and cover an increasing variety of subjects. Many of these programmes and courses are offered as study combined with work.

Since 1998, nine lifelong learning centres have been established, one in each of the main regions of the country. They offer a variety of continuing education courses. The lifelong learning centres also facilitate distance education at the upper secondary and higher education levels by providing technical and organizational facilities, such as video-conferencing and enrollment of students.

In addition to these developments that parallel the thrust of the Bologna Process, it has recently become possible for an increasing number of HEIs to award master's degrees. Currently, there is work under way on revising Act no. 136/1997 in order to facilitate the process of allowing HEIs to issue joint degrees.

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

Transfers from one course of study to another or from one institution to another are always subject to the approval of the academic authorities of the receiving faculty or institution. The receiving faculty decides how many credits can be transferred towards a new programme, usually on the recommendations made by study committees that are composed of students and teachers in each department. Transfers between subjects within the same faculty are usually easily arranged, but may involve some loss of credits earned. Intermediate qualifications from HEIs may in some cases be recognised as part of a degree course, usually as a minor subject.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes

Joint degrees do not have a clear legal basis, according to the existing Universities Act. However, the Ministry of Education is preparing an amendment to the Act to facilitate joint degrees or joint study programmes.

11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees

There are some integrated master's programmes leading to double degrees, but these

are very few in number.

11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)

Some Icelandic universities offer study programmes through distance learning in co-operation with foreign universities. Examinations, projects and theses are then evaluated by both universities. Students pay registration fees to both universities, and when they complete the programme they receive diplomas from both universities.

Collaboration at the doctoral level has been on an individual basis, i.e. programmes have been “tailor made” for particular students who have asked for permission to study for doctoral degrees under the supervision of two separate universities.

11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education

In addition to the integrated master's programmes and co-operation at the doctoral level there are examples of transnational co-operation where students at the master's level take part of their studies (one semester of predetermined courses) at another university abroad, or where instructors come from universities abroad to give their courses at an Icelandic institution.

11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension (For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)

Programmes in European studies, such as programmes on law, political science, economics and management, are offered in different HEIs. Some HEIs offer courses or a whole study programme in foreign language learning.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA

Most HEIs offer courses where English is the language of teaching. In recent years an increasing number of students from countries, both within and outside the EHEA, have studied at an Icelandic HEI. When Iceland held the chairmanship in 2004 of the Nordic Council of Ministers, a conference on the Global Educational Market - Nordic Participation took place. The aim was to look into the possibilities of the Nordic countries to attract foreign students to the HEIs in the Nordic countries. Perspectives from the USA and Europe were introduced at the conference.

13. Concluding comments

13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies

The Ministry of Education has made a commitment to continue to adhere to the Bologna process in close co-operation with the HEIs. When laws and regulations on the HEIs are to be revised the Bologna process will be one of the main aspects taken into account.

13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country

The possible main challenges in the coming years are:

- to formalize the processes for accreditation and recognition
- to further strengthen the national QA system
- to increase international co-operation in QA
- to integrate the learning outcome perspectives in HEIs
- to further increase and improve opportunities for doctoral studies
- to develop a system of evaluation of research at HEIs for budgetary purposes.