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Higher Education Area

bologna process

TRANSPARENCY TOOLS ACROSS THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

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Transparency Tools across the European Higher Education Area

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Introduction

This report can provide some basic reference points for both policy makers and the public interested in higher education. If read as a whole, the report pictures a *transparency map* within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). If read by sections it offers insights also to those who try to take personal decisions regarding higher education and find themselves confronted with a diversity of information, from various sources, which are not always convergent.

The report has been prepared by the Transparency Tools Working Group for the 2012 Ministerial Conference at the request of the EHEA Ministers[1]. The report reflects the discussions within the Transparency Tools Working Group and its recommendations were taken into account by the Bologna Follow-Up Group when drafting the Bucharest Communiqué "Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area".

Through its Terms of Reference, the Working Group was asked to "monitor the development of the transparency tools and mechanisms both the purposes and the objectives (information, accountability, quality) and the indicators and criteria used (input/processes, output/outcome)."

The Working Group focused on:

- the transparency function of Bologna tools, structures and processes;
- national classifications, national rankings, national databases;
- international rankings and classifications;

[1] European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education (2009) "The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade" s.l. [Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve].

The scope of the report is limited to the countries of the Bologna Process.

For the 2009 - 2012 timeframe, the Transparency Tools Working Group had five regular meetings, it organised one workshop for its members and one mini-seminar at BFUG level. It sent out two questionnaires, one in 2010 and one in 2011. The report is based on the 2011 questionnaire, to which 34 countries have responded. The full list of respondents can be viewed in Annex 1.

The basis of the work of the Transparency Tools Working Group was laid by the European Higher Education Area's ministers in the Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué:

"We note that there are several current initiatives designed to develop mechanisms for providing more detailed information about higher education institutions across the EHEA to make their diversity more transparent. We believe that any such mechanisms, including those helping higher education systems and institutions to identify and compare their respective strengths, should be developed in close consultation with the key stakeholders. These transparency tools need to relate closely to the principles of the Bologna Process, in particular quality assurance and recognition, which will remain our priority, and should be based on comparable data and adequate indicators to describe the diverse profiles of higher education institutions and their programmes."

The BFUG was asked, amongst others, "to monitor the development of the transparency mechanisms and to report back to the 2012 ministerial conference".

Executive Summary

Transparency can be listed among the principles of the Bologna Process. In the first decade of the Process, transparency was needed in order to understand and compare higher education systems across borders. The Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué added another meaning to the term: it called for transparency of the diversity of higher education institutions, while acknowledging that their missions are diverse as a response to wider societal needs.

In the common understanding of the Working Group members, the main function of transparency tools is to enable understanding of the diversity of higher education provision, nationally and cross-nationally, in order to support users in making informed decisions. Although their primary function is information provision, transparency tools can also support accountability, quality improvement and strategic governance, if designed and used properly. The publics' interests and capacities are diverse, hence only a mix of transparency tools can address properly their information needs.

At national level, five countries have provided information about empirical studies on what are (prospective) students' information needs regarding higher education. The conclusions of these studies indicate that the quality of higher education provision is indeed important, but other contextual factors, such as distance from home and peer preferences, exercise a strong influence on choices.

The Bologna Process has considerably improved transparency across EHEA countries. Its tools, structures and processes contributed to creating transparency inside higher education systems too, even though they were intended to deliver mainly cross-national transparency. Bologna tools can contribute significantly to enabling all interested students' and employers' understanding of their alternatives with regards to higher education. Currently, the Bologna tools' potential is not used optimally. The meaningful implementation of learning outcomes, building on a common methodology, is expected to improve the transparency of higher education provision across the EHEA and also within national systems. The impact of learning outcomes may be significant especially for identifying adequate and/or desired study choices and for understanding the value of the achieved qualifications.

The effectiveness of the Bologna Process tools and processes in terms of improving transparency is affected by improper implementation in some parts of the EHEA. Bologna tools are complex and comprehensive, as they rest on specialised structures and processes. Probably because of this reason they are not easy to communicate to the wider public, particularly to students and employers. Bologna tools and processes fare less well in enabling intuitive comparison of educational alternatives; they were designed to ease the understanding of cross-border diversity, while affecting it as little as possible.

Classifications and rankings complement the Bologna tools, processes and structures to a certain extent, as they are focused on information mainly for the purpose of comparison. They generally use means of communication that address all categories of the public, especially non-specialist ones. National classifications and rankings are not used extensively in EHEA countries, according to the results of the survey. Their effectiveness in filling the transparency gaps is questioned due to some built-in limits (mostly by specialised audiences), but also due to unfortunate alignment with public stereotypes and policy incentives.

Global rankings are currently quite prominent in public debates. Their prominence is related to the assumption that wide audiences use them for straightforward comparisons between educational, employment or investment alternatives. The global rankings monitored have improved their data accuracy and are increasingly adopting a user-driven approach. Yet their contribution to transparency in the EHEA seems to be targeted mainly towards those students and staff with little obstacles to being mobile. Global rankings do not cover the vast majority of higher education institutions (HEIs) within the EHEA. They are criticised for not measuring properly teaching and the third mission of universities, as well as for displaying some other conceptual or measurement biases.

The survey pointed out that different meanings are associated with the words "ranking" and "classification". Traditionally, classifications cluster higher education institutions in classes of similarity, while rankings assign higher education institutions, departments or study programmes to a hierarchical order. The classifications that cluster elements into hierarchically ordered classes, also named "ratings" or "vertical classifications" represent the major overlapping and sometimes generate confusion, as it was the case with the survey.

The report concludes that there are aspects of higher education which may be of high relevance for beneficiaries and which are currently not transparent enough. These areas refer mainly to the substantive educational experience (issues like student mentoring and support, as well as the quality of teaching) and the employability of graduates.

It appears that data on higher education which can be relevant to the users is collected extensively at national level. Up to now it is unclear to what extent the data is known by the public and if it is comparable across countries. Before moving forward with collecting more data, it may prove a rewarding exercise to explore the better use of existing databases for filling in current information gaps and improving existing tools.

There are substantial efforts laid in the international community to address the identified information gaps. The most influential ones are succinctly presented below:

- The assessment of the feasibility of measuring and comparing the achieved learning outcomes for first cycle (undergraduate) students at international level. The OECD is running such a feasibility study entitled Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO);

- The development of a user-driven, multidimensional ranking that would measure performance in teaching, research, knowledge exchange, internationalisation and regional engagement. It uses a classification to compare only those higher education institutions which are comparable. It is promoted as U-Multirank and it is part of the "Modernisation Agenda" of the European Commission;

- The European Tertiary Education Register is developed to collect data from national statistical offices. Two sets of data are to be collected: data on core activities for all tertiary education institutions and data on research for the research active ones. It is part of the "Modernisation Agenda" of the European Commission and its concept was proved feasible by the EUMIDA project;

- The auditing of rankings against "The Berlin Principles of Rankings Higher Education Institutions". The initiative belongs to the Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (IREG).

- The development of indicators for higher education institutions' third mission. Additionally, a Data Base of European Third Mission Providers was set up, building on four indicators that were considered strategic. The innitiative was developed within the E3M project - European Indicators And Ranking Methodology For University Third Mission, financed by the European Commission.

There are several other initiatives under development, which could contribute to further enhancing information and transparency on European higher education, such as the study on student and graduate tracking of the European University Association. Monitoring such initiatives would prove relevant for understanding the evolution of the mix of tools that deliver transparency in the EHEA, as well as for the identification of remaining gaps.

The public should be aware that transparency tools can help in making informed decisions. They should also acknowledge that transparency tools have their limits and are helpful if used for appropriate purposes. This report also provides an overview of limits and appropriate usages

The public should be aware that transparency tools can help them in making informed decisions. They should also acknowledge that all transparency tools have their limits.

Policy Recommendations

1 The existing transparency tools should be further developed and complemented in order to achieve a better understanding of the diversity of higher education, under all its aspects, at system level, institutional level and study programme level. The developments should be further monitored at supra-national level. Rankings as such should not be used as grounds for policies like recognition, international cooperation and funding;

2 Transparency should be treated as an important aspect of higher education policies and should be grounded on evidence about users' needs for information. Such policies should be adapted to users' preferences and capacities to collect and process information;

3 Governments should encourage the development of indicators and processes that would enable higher education institutions and systems to identify and communicate their various profiles, especially those that have been "in the shadow" with the existing transparency tools, such as teaching and the third mission;

4 Governments, collective actors such as stakeholders' organisations, and individual higher education institutions should support the "democratisation" of transparency tools, by making them more user-driven and their methodologies more transparent. They should look into ways to empower users, especially students, in relation to the issuers of transparency tools;

5 The Bologna tools should also be used in their ability to contribute to enhancing transparency, e.g. regarding the information that they can provide on employability, student support, student/staff ratios or other aspects of the learning experience. ECTS should become a real common currency in EHEA, by ensuring comparable basis of credit allocation. Diploma Supplements should carry more relevant information on learning outcomes, and should be issued free of charge to all students, in a widely spoken language. Emphasis should be put on learning outcomes and their proper implementation in relation to qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement;

6 Governments and higher education institutions should strive to improve the way Bologna objectives and tools are communicated to the public. The Bologna tools should therefore also be evaluated regarding their ability to inform and provide guidance for higher education beneficiaries, in particular to students, researchers and employers, as they are less acquainted with how higher education institutions function. Issues such as how widely they are known and used should be addressed.

7 Governments should raise the awareness of the public regarding the purpose and limitations of transparency tools. They should put more efforts in educating the public on how to interpret and use different transparency tools. They should also defend the public's interests in relation to the issuers of transparency tools, if

8 Complementarity among transparency tools should be sought. Policy makers should strive to bridge the policy communities developing and refining different tools. Complementarity should also be underlined when presenting the transparency tools to the public.

As a contribution to consolidating trust in the EHEA, common guidance and understanding of transparency should be developed within the Bologna Process.

Transparency within the Bologna Process

The understanding of transparency within the Bologna Process can be complete only if tied to the understanding of diversity within the European Higher Education Area. Ministers called for transparency in order to depict diversity and to create trust premises for cross-border cooperation. The substantive diversity of higher education provision is highly valued within the Bologna Process; therefore transparency approaches in this realm should defend and promote diversity, if deemed useful for the society.

The first decade

One of the motivations associated to the emergence of the Bologna Process is the fact that, in most cases, there was quite a challenge to understand a qualification gained in a different higher education system. The Bologna Process has prompted national reforms that led to the implementation of compatible and comparable tools, structures and processes that in turn contributed to making sense of cross-border diversity.

The Bologna Declaration establishes "a system of **easily readable and comparable degrees"** and the Diploma Supplement as policy tools that aim "to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system". The London Communiqué adds "accessible information" and qualifications frameworks to the policy tools that aim to increase mobility and the "attractiveness and competitiveness" of the European Higher Education Area.

The notion *transparency* as such appears for the first time in the Berlin Communiqué, as a beneficial consequence of "institutions and employers […] mak[ing] full use of the Diploma Supplement", where the policy objective is to "foster[…] employability and facilitate[…] academic recognition for further studies". It also appears in Bergen Communiqué as one of the principles[2] based on which the ministers wish to establish a European Higher Education Area. In the London Communiqué, the principle of transparency appears again, related to qualifications frameworks which are referred to as „important instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between, higher education systems".

[2] The other principle is quality.

"European Higher Education Area [...] is an area where [...] all higher education institutions are responsive to the wider needs of society through the diversity of their missions"

The additional focus brought by Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué

In most of its text, the Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué acknowledges the contribution of the Bologna Process to describing cross-border diversity. It adds another focus by calling for "provision of more detailed information" in order to enable public understanding of higher education institutions' diversity, in the paragraph on "multidimensional transparency tools". While previously diversity was seen from a cross-border perspective, here it is understood as differences between individual higher education institutions. The Communiqué notes that "European Higher Education Area [...] is an area where [...] all higher education institutions are responsive to the wider needs of society through the diversity of their missions". In the same Communiqué, the ministers reaffirmed their commitment to HEIs serving different functions, as they were laid down in the London Communiqué:

- "preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society;
- preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development;
- creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base;
- stimulating research and innovation."

The Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué lays special emphasis on "helping higher education systems and institutions to identify and compare their respective strengths", in a period when rankings featured high on European Union's higher education agenda[3]. The paragraph on "multidimensional transparency tools" can be regarded as an attempt to bridge the EU agenda with the Bologna Process.

The Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué marked the extension of the Bologna Process agenda to monitoring transparency tools such as rankings and classifications, in addition to the ones already covered in the first Bologna decade.

Before the Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, transparency is presented in the Bologna Process official documents as a desirable characteristic of the European Higher Education Area that is to be reached by implementing mainly ECTS, Diploma Supplement and qualifications frameworks. Although it was referred to as a principle, transparency appeared rather instrumental for the academic mobility[4] within the EHEA.

[3] The conclusions of the Conference on "International comparison of education systems: a European model?" held in Paris, on 13-14 November 2008 (http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid22945/-comparaison-internationale-des-systemeseducatifs-un-modele-europeen.html or http://www.eu2008.fr), called for the mapping of the different dimensions of excellence of the Higher Education and Research institutions in Europe, in an international context, to be carried out by an independent consortium. In response, the European Commission funded the testing of the feasibility of a multidimensional, global ranking of higher education institutions. The tender was launched on November, 27th, 2008 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/calls/3608/index_en.html).

[4] Mobility itself would lead towards increased employability of graduates and enhanced attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA.

Working description of transparency tools

Transparency tools can be seen as having primarily an information provision function. Their users can be diverse, ranging from students and families to businesses, faculty and policy makers, such as HEIs' leaders and government officials. Within each category of beneficiaries, it can be expected that individuals have quite diverse information needs and expectations. It would be probably impossible for transparency tools to meet all individual demands at once.

Trade-offs are usually required between public outreach and specialisation in providing transparency for a certain category of higher education beneficiaries if, on average:

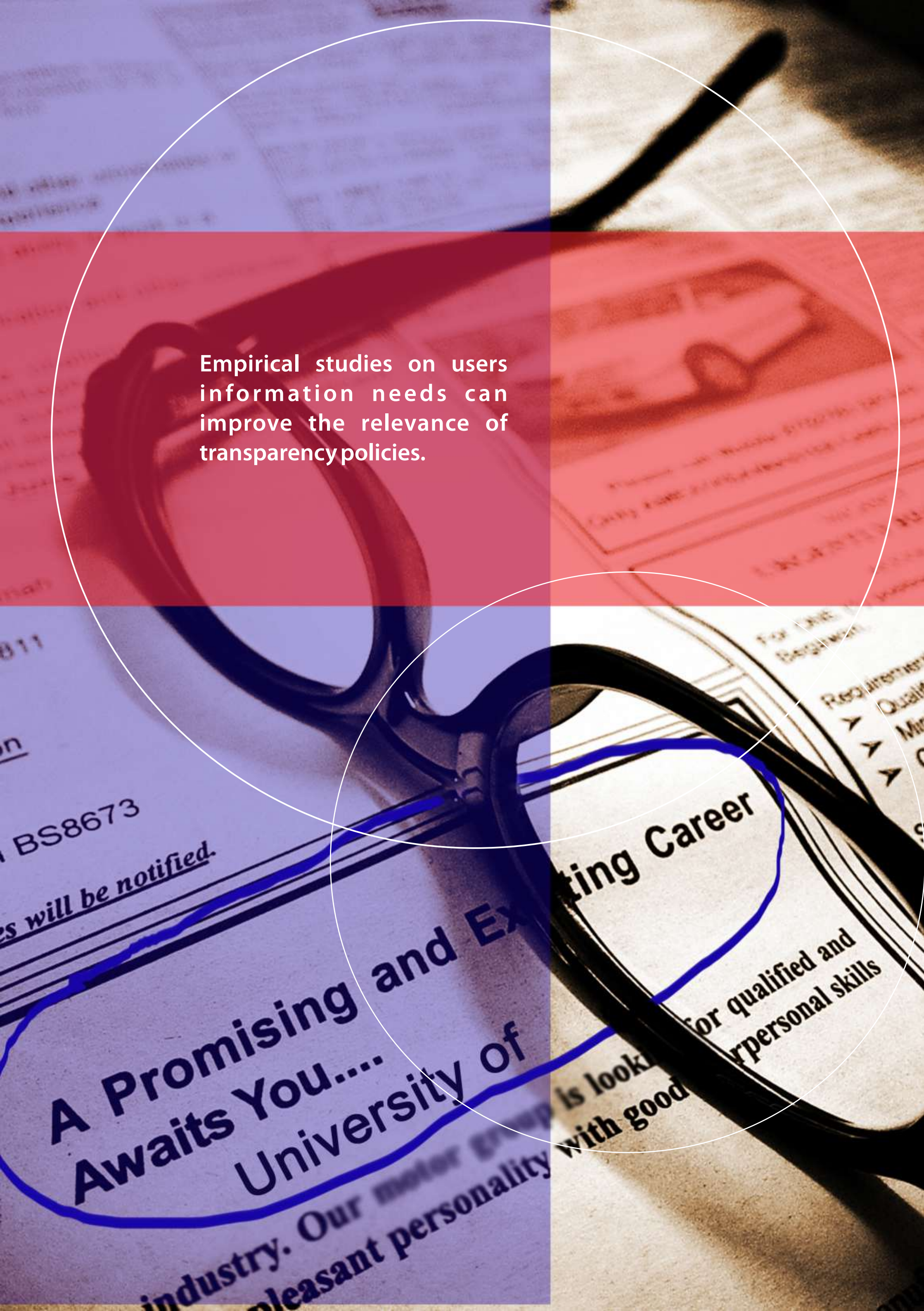
- Students and their families are mainly interested in information for enrolment purposes. Their capacity to process specific higher education related information is probably not generally high;
- Teaching, research and administrative staff are mainly interested in information for academic purposes. Their capacity to process specific higher education related information should be considerably higher than students and their families;
- Business developers and employers, private and public, are generally focused on knowledge transfer, both through specific processes and graduates; it can be assumed that their capacity to process specific higher education related information is also rather low;
- Policy makers are a specific category of information users. Their specificity rests both in their nature as custodians of the public interest, but also in the supposition that they have an increased capacity to process information, through their specialised services.

People need to make sense of their "encounters" with higher education: study programmes, qualifications, degrees, departments, faculties etc. and to choose amongst alternatives in particular situations.

Transparency tools need to enable understanding of higher education structures, and sometimes to facilitate choice, either by grouping together what is similar, by excluding what does not fit expectations, or by comparing desirable alternatives.

By easing the understanding of a sometimes bewildering diversity of options, transparency tools facilitate interactions and contribute to building trust in the field of higher education. They are meant to inform decisions that lead to actions which can range in their nature from being individual (e.g. where to enrol), institutional (e.g. the strategic orientation of HEIs), or systemic (e.g. national policy orientation). Individual choices sum up and sometimes can have a significant impact for higher education institutions and even for higher education systems. In such cases, transparency tools can support accountability, quality improvement, and strategic governance, if designed properly and provided that individual choices are based on them. These are all consequential functions of transparency tools, while their core remains information provision for enabling understanding.

The report acknowledges that transparency tools cannot cover all relevant aspects of higher education. Education is a substantially subjective experience, hence it is hard to imagine that a mix of transparency tools, be them as advanced as possible, can provide all relevant information for the beneficiaries of higher education. Furthermore, the report acknowledges that more information does not necessarily imply more transparency. In order to increase transparency, the information has to be meaningful and understandable. Users can feel overwhelmed with information and hence their decision is clogged. Transparency is about supporting decisions, not about simply providing more or newer information.



Empirical studies on users information needs can improve the relevance of transparency policies.

The evidence basis for transparency policies

Case -study: prospective students[5]

The responses to the 2011 questionnaire indicate that in nine countries[6] across the EHEA specific governmental policies are grounded on studies on how prospective students make their enrolment decisions. Some of the respondents have summarised the conclusions of such studies. The overview reveals that:

- Prospective students' interest or capacities in a certain academic subject or discipline exert the most noticeable influence on choice. In this respect, they need information mainly on the content of the course (Lithuania, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

- Graduates employability and career prospects are also important motives (Lithuania, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

- Students are interested in the quality of the study programmes or of the institutions, including existing facilities and infrastructure (Germany, Moldova and the Netherlands). In the UK, student satisfaction surveys play an important role.

- In many cases, other contextual factors influence student choice, such as the distance between the universities and their home town (Germany, Moldova and the Netherlands), financial issues such as fees or accommodation costs (United Kingdom).

- Social factors such as the choice of their peers or parents' preferences are important decision determinants (Moldova). The attractiveness of the city and the social environment within campuses are important in the Netherlands, while in the UK information on student unions was deemed relevant for enrolment.

One respondent put forward the warning that there is a multitude of studies on the information needs of students and that their conclusions do not converge all the time.

The policy debates surrounding the topic of transparency invoke quite frequently, in a form or another, the belief that prospective students behave as long term utility maximisers and have an investment model in mind when they choose their educational path.

The literature review[7] indicates that students are sometimes not so consistent in their enrolment decisions and they use a diversity of information sources. "Word of mouth" information from secondary education teachers, peers, relatives or friends, generalist newspapers etc. is influential, in spite of its unstructured and subjective character. HEIs also provide information on their study programme offer, sometimes in a manner closer to

[5] The beneficiaries of transparency policies can belong to varied categories. The focus on prospective students is motivated by the assumption that they are least empowered for dealing with complex choices and multiple information.

[6] Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Lichtenstein, Moldova, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

[7] UK: „Understanding the information needs of users of public information about higher education", Report to HEFCE by Oakleigh Consulting and Staffordshire University, August 2010 and Australia: Richard James, Gabrielle Baldwin, Craig McInnis "Which University? The factors influencing the choices of prospective undergraduates", 1999, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne.

marketing than to informative purposes. It seems that there is a multitude of *transparency providers* that compete for attention; their motivations range from serving the public interest to obtaining private profits.

Governmental policies in the field of transparency can be legitimate if they aim at empowering the beneficiaries. Some of the possible means of achieving this goal are listed below:

- regulating the framework for information provision. As an example, policies could address the quality of the information provided or the comparability of data and information;
- providing information or supporting its provision;
- educating the public.

The conclusions of empirical studies contradict at least partially the belief that students behave like long-term utility maximizing investors when choosing where to enrol. Transparency policies constructed on such beliefs stand high risks to be ineffective due to fallibility of their assumptions on beneficiaries' specific needs. Empirical studies can improve the relevance of governmental policies in the field of transparency. This approach is used only in few EHEA countries.

An interesting example of evidence based transparency is the development of a Key Information Set (KIS)[8] in the United Kingdom, following a study on students' information needs commissioned by HEFCE[9]. KIS lumps together information on student satisfaction, graduate employment and further education, tuition fees, accommodation costs in institution owned/sponsored premises, private rental market, the different modes of delivery used for learning and teaching and their respective proportions, the assessment types and their proportions. KIS aims to provide all the listed items to enable comparisons across different institutions and it builds mostly on existing databases, at higher education system or

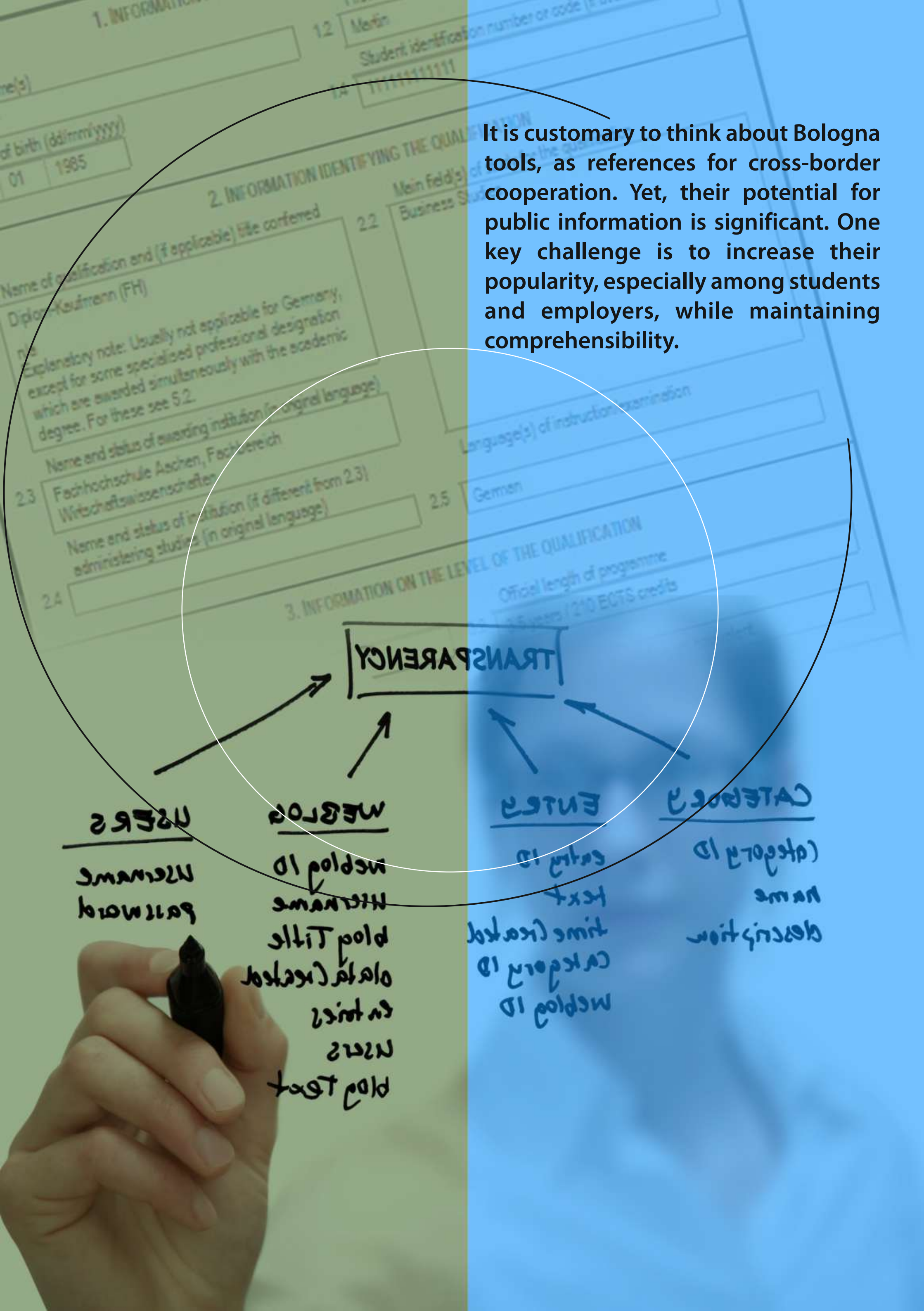
Transparency tools used across the EHEA countries

The respondents to the questionnaire have identified the following as being [10]"transparency tools":

- Bologna tools, such as: quality assurance, recognition, ECTS credits system, qualifications frameworks, learning outcomes, three cycles system, Diploma Supplement;
- national classifications, national and international rankings, national and international databases;
- national admission websites, higher education institutions' websites;
- study guides, registers of accredited programmes/institutions, ENIC/NARIC centers;

[8] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/infohe/kis.htm
[9] Oakleigh Consulting and Staffordshire University, 2010, cited above.
[10] The opinion of the respondents may have been influenced by the focus on Bologna tools, rankings and classification of the Mini-seminar organized in Cracow, on October 12th under the kind host of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The event targeted the same audience as the questionnaire and in the same period.

It is customary to think about Bologna tools, as references for cross-border cooperation. Yet, their potential for public information is significant. One key challenge is to increase their popularity, especially among students and employers, while maintaining comprehensibility.



- annual reports issued by the Ministries of Education, university self-evaluation reports;
- career guidance programmes, information on the degree of employability of the graduates;
- open house and other marketing efforts by HEIs, public campaigns and public debates;
- student finance information, research assessment exercises.

The responses to the questionnaire reveal that in 25 countries, the ministries acknowledge that Bologna Process tools contribute to public information about higher education. In 24 countries respondents mention the existence of other transparency tools. Some of these tools are supported or issued by governmental agencies.

Transparency is sought through a mix of tools across the EHEA countries. Bologna Process tools, structures and processes, rankings and classifications are some of the widely known and used. The existing transparency tools, both provided by the government and available on the market, can complement each other, as well as compete for the attention of the public.

The contribution of the Bologna Process to transparency

The Bologna Process has placed significant emphasis on the substantive diversity of higher education. Its tools, structures and processes are meant to render higher education compatible and comparable, while not altering the diversity of its content. In this respect, their implementation allows for adjustments in terms of adaptation to the national/institutional particularities, which sometimes hampers cross-national comparability. The tool that belongs to the Bologna Process and was initially meant to explicitly carry information is the Diploma Supplement. Bologna tools, structures and processes were originally aimed at creating trust for cross-border cooperation. However, they have the potential to contribute to domestic transparency. A detailed analysis in this respect is presented in Annex 2.

Qualifications frameworks constitute a frame for referencing higher education. They can contribute to enabling prospective students and their families to compare and contrast the available study choices in terms of level of qualification, effort to gain it and the associated progression opportunities. Qualifications frameworks are meant to contribute to understanding how different qualifications fit within the national higher education study framework. Students and their families may use qualifications frameworks to construct their desired educational paths.

Qualifications frameworks can be used by employers to gain better understanding of the tertiary education qualifications presented or required for employment. Faculty and administrative staff can use qualifications frameworks as a single reference against which to describe study programmes. For the general public, qualifications frameworks offer a structure of quality assured qualifications.

The qualifications frameworks have developed and refined the ideas put forward initially with the degree systems. Qualifications frameworks rest on a set of tools that include: learning outcomes, national qualifications registers, ECTS as a *common currency* for workload, and accreditation. Within qualifications frameworks, the substantive description of the educational experience relies on **learning outcomes.**

In the Bologna Process architecture, learning outcomes represent the tool that is best equipped to inform the public on what to expect from higher education. In this sense, they constitute the basis on which individuals, especially students and employers, can compare the intended learning outcomes of an educational route with the achieved ones.

Based on such comparisons, individuals can *punish* or *reward* higher education institutions accordingly. Employers may decide to trust or not an institution, while students may recommend or not a study programme to their peers. Such a mechanism can constitute a mean for the public to hold higher education institutions accountable through their private decisions, provided that a significant proportion of beneficiaries rely on learning outcomes to evaluate the quality of higher education.

Learning outcomes are also an important part of other Bologna tools, such as ECTS and Diploma Supplement. To a certain extent, they can be considered as being the key to the Bologna Process transparency promise. A common methodology for writing and implementing learning outcomes would both make the EHEA more transparent and further its implementation.

In order to fulfil their transparency purpose, learning outcomes, qualifications frameworks and the link between the two need to be understandable, credible, and functional. Currently, learning outcomes are defined in multiple ways across the EHEA, some of them compatible with each other, some of them not necessarily so. This situation poses a problem to cross-border transparency. At the same time, it is questionable how far those definitions are known, understood and actually put into practice, which affects learning outcomes' efficiency for providing domestic transparency.

Quality assurance entangles quite a developed set of tools, structures and processes: The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), and membership of The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Quality assurance, both internal and external, is a crucial process for HEIs and this fact should not be overlooked in the search for more comparability and transparency through such processes.

In terms of information purposes, quality assurance is employed to holistically describe HEIs or study programmes and/or to tell if HEIs/study programmes meet the defined academic standards (accreditation). The first part of the ESG also provides references to institutions describing learning outcomes and student evaluations.

Out of the different outcomes of audits, accreditation and quality reviews, the accreditation result, usually "yes" or "no", is probably most appealing for the purpose of public communication and is perceived as being the easiest to understand. Based on it, the public should easily identify what is a "no go" option. One of the main problems associated with accreditation is that the facts behind the judgments that lead to "yes" or "no" may not be visible to the public. Another problem is that not only quality assurance agencies that work in line with the ESG and are listed in EQAR/ are members of ENQA and/or are recognised at national level can accredit study programmes or institutions. The purpose of such agencies can be different (e.g. professionally or marketing oriented). Such cases are not frequent in the EHEA.

In this respect, membership of ENQA and listing in EQAR can be seen as transparency tools, as they testify that quality assurance agencies act in line with the ESG.

For the users which are not content with "yes" and "no" information, quality assurance can provide comprehensive information about strengths and weaknesses, and thus a holistic view on the quality of a study programme. Quality assurance does not render easily comparable, nor order those HEIs/study programmes that passed the accreditation threshold, unless a benchmark approach is taken.

"The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report" points to one of QA's shortcomings in terms of transparency at national level: negative reports are not published as widely as positive ones. Furthermore, published reports' summaries need to be meaningful for non-academic beneficiaries and adequate in size and language.

Quality assurance can be a meaningful tool for transparency across countries, provided that the reports are internationally comparable. This is currently an issue and ENQA is working towards providing a European framework for quality assurance reports.

ECTS is one of the Bologna tools that are widely known. It may be an efficient domestic transparency tool, provided that it describes properly the learning outcomes and student workload. It poses a problem of EHEA wide comparability, as the basis for ECTS allocation varies significantly across countries, according to the 2012 Implementation Report.

The Diploma Supplement was initially designed to collect and carry information, mainly for cross-border academic recognition. It consists of the status of the institution and the programme, the level of qualification, the official duration of the programme, the access requirements, the mode of studies, programme requirements, programme details, description of HE system.

The Diploma Supplement can also be used for non-academic matters. Employers can use it to contrast information on the academic background of individual job applicants, for facilitating the employment process. Graduates can present it as a record of their higher education.

The 2012 Implementation Report warns that in many cases Diploma Supplements are not prepared properly and hence do not provide the expected information to the users. There is a substantial number of countries which fail to issue Diploma Supplements to all their graduates or/and to issue it automatically. In some countries, fees are charged when issuing the Diploma Supplement. On the practical side, many students do not know about the Diploma Supplement.

Due to improper issuing, Diploma Supplement provides the transparency that is expected from it in rather few cases, and thus does not live up to its full potential. Different definitions of learning outcomes across countries and the language issues reduce its EHEA wide capacity for transparency.

Official Bologna Process reports (stocktaking, national reports), statistical reports (provided by Eurydice, Eurostat, Eurostudent), or stakeholders' reports (ESU's "Bologna With Student Eyes" or EUA's "Trends") can also be considered as having a public information purpose. Their audience is probably limited to the ones who follow the Bologna Process as they require familiarity with many details of the process. Offering different perspectives on the same reform process ensures pluralism of views, but at the same time it may be confusing for the less initiated public.

The colour associated to the 'traffic-light' Bologna Process scorecard reports may become a political matter, especially if esteem, promotion or other benefits are associated with how good a country "is doing" in those reports. The reporting exercise can incentivise strategic behaviour, which can easily be at odds with being honest in describing the reality. In such cases, the transparency function of reporting is being heavily diminished. The Bologna Process is a model of cooperation which cannot sanction inaccurate individual reports; therefore such individual actions can erode the credibility of the overall report and of the Bologna Process itself.

It is customary to think about the Bologna tools, structures, and processes as references for academic life or enablers for cross-border cooperation. Yet, the potential for public information of the Bologna tools, structures, and processes is significant. They have not yet been evaluated from this perspective.

The tools, structures and processes developed within the Bologna Process are designed to be complex transparency tools. They are meant to contribute to enabling understanding of the learning experience. In order to fulfil their transparency potential, they need to be communicated in a friendlier manner to categories of the public that have not followed the Process so closely. One key challenge for the Bologna tools, structures, and processes is to become more popular, especially among students and employers, while maintaining comprehensibility.

Bologna tools, structures, and processes describe study programmes and/or institutions within and across entire higher education systems; they are available for all those interested. Their shortcomings due to improper or inconsistent implementation represent an important threat to achieving their transparency purpose, both inside countries, but also cross-border.

Bologna tools, structures, and processes were not meant for direct comparisons between strengths of different educational alternatives. Their design owes much to the view that they should affect only the structures, not the substantive diversity of the EHEA (curriculum, modes of delivery, institutional ethos etc.). This specific approach of the Bologna tools does not have to be perceived as a shortcoming, but rather as a built in consequence of the political intergovernmental approach, and of their original purpose.

In order to fulfil their transparency function, Bologna Process tools need to rely on each other. This implies that the Bologna Process cannot be approached à la carte and also that further efforts are required in order to make the best out of the synergies between different elements of the Process architecture.

The Bologna Process tools could improve the information they provide on the substantive educational experience (issues like student mentoring and support, as well as the quality of teaching) and the employability of graduates.

The WG strongly believes that such an approach would increase the public support for the Bologna Process that would definitely trigger political impetuous.

Classifications and rankings can be reliable transparency tools if the data they provide is accurate, if their indicators are good enough proxies for what they claim to measure and if users understand where the differences in the results provided come from.

Rankings and classifications

Rankings and classifications complement to a certain extent the Bologna tools, structures, and processes mainly through providing data that can be used to compare study programmes, higher education institutions and/or their sub-units. They were not developed within the Bologna Process. The questionnaire revealed that the terms "classifications" or "rankings" are understood differently across the EHEA, therefore the report also provides some conceptual clarifications about these tools.

Rankings and classifications: conceptual clarifications

Rankings have a criterion or a set of criteria against which the individual elements (HEIs, departments, study programmes) are being evaluated. They offer one or more hierarchies, based either on the score of an individual element or on their place in a hierarchy drawn on scores.

The indicators used are generally output oriented, and they claim to measure the performance or the reputation. They are made available to the public as a tool to guide private decisions regarding higher education institutions. Traditionally, rankings are communicated as league tables, each HEI or study programme being ranked according to the individual score. Other approaches assign individual HEIs to hierarchically ordered classes in order to avoid the misinterpretation of minor differences in the nominal value indicator as differences in performance and quality.

Rankings offer information on the performance of study programmes, on higher education institutions or their sub-units based on a set of criteria. They can be used to compare alternatives on the covered criteria. They can be misused if their results are interpreted as accounting for overall quality or for some other criteria which were not included in the ranking.

At their origins, rankings were developed as a form of consumer review that is led by the market. Their mechanism can basically be portrayed as rankers meeting the existing demand for information, and this is probably a fair explanation for their popularity[14]. With rankings, the users are the ones deciding where to enrol, without having any option banned by the rankers, provided that all alternatives are listed. Furthermore, they can opt for whether or not they want to use the ranking, as well as any other source of information. In contrast, state accreditation protects citizens from inappropriate provision of higher education. In most of the cases, the state authorities, as custodians of the public interest, ban "bad" choices in addition to providing information to the public. From this perspective, rankings and state accreditation can be seen as lying on different sides of the ideological divide, both with benefits and drawbacks that need to be acknowledged.

[14] Rankings' current popularity is indicated by various issues, such as political declarations, scholar research, and definitely the newspapers which they sold.

Classifications organise institutions into clusters built around indicators relevant for their discriminative capacity. Ideally, one institution cannot be distributed in more than one cluster, based on the same indicator.

A classification can, and generally does, use more than one indicator. Their comprehensiveness is given by the number of indicators used. Based on the types of indicators used (descriptive or evaluative), the classifications can be descriptive (or horizontal), hierarchical (or vertical), or mixed. Empirical classifications reflect HEIs' spontaneous arrangement in clusters, while administrative ones operate with predefined categories. Administrative classes serve as basis for national policies (financing, accreditation, qualifications, institutional diversity etc.)

Classifications generally offer information on institutions' intensiveness in certain fields of activity. They can be used to paint a picture of the profile of a higher education institution or to group higher education institutions with similar profiles.

The classifications that cluster elements into hierarchically ordered classes, also named "ratings" or "vertical classifications" represent the major overlapping and sometimes generate confusion, as it was the case with the survey. They use classes to communicate results, but they send the message that elements belonging to a class are more than elements belonging to a lower class.

Frequently enough, even descriptive classifications are perceived as being hierarchical due to some "public stereotypes". Probably the widest spread "public stereotype" is that research universities are better than the ones focused on learning and teaching, not that they are simply different. Public perceptions, especially amongst academia, are also influenced by the incentives of the policies associated with the classifications.

Classifications and rankings can be reliable transparency tools if the data they provide are accurate, if their indicators are good enough proxies for what they claim to measure and if users understand where the differences in the results provided come from. Furthermore, they need to be clear and understandable on their purposes and methodologies. Those that have only general knowledge about how higher education works use rankings quite often and there is the risk that their choice is misled. The efficiency of classifications as transparency tools can be affected by public stereotypes and the incentives within the governmental policies or within the market.

A significant share of classifications and rankings rely on quantifiable indicators. This approach is criticised on the on the grounds that it is believed there are important aspects of higher education that cannot be measured and quantified. The choice of indicators, dimensions, and weight of aggregation may not necessarily be relevant for the users, but rather determined by measurement technologies, existing data and the preferences of those who issue the classifications and rankings. Rankings are especially charged of being biased towards different issues, such as disciplines, language, size of institution, post-graduate and research intensiveness, etc. In the case of league tables, top ranked positions appear quite stable, while towards the middle and lower end of the list fluctuations account to rather methodological issues than substantive changes in HEIs' performance[15].

[15]The conclusions on the limits of rankings and classifications are inspired from: Andrejs Rauhvagers „Global University Rankings and Their Impact", The European University Association, 2011; Ellen Hazelkorn „Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education. The Battle for World Class Exellence", Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; Assessment of University-Based Research Expert Group *"Assessing Europe's University-Based Research"*, European Commission, Brussels, 2010; Frans van Vught & Frank Ziegele (eds.) "U-Multirank: Design and Testing the Feasibility of a Multidimensional Global University Ranking" final report, Consortium for Higher Education and Research Performance Assessment, CHERPA-Network, June 2011. For an extensive account of the limits of rankings and classifications, please refer to these publications.

Classifications in EHEA countries

The findings of the questionnaire and the presentations revealed the existence of three types of classifications in EHEA countries:

1. **Classifications assigning HEIs to classes that should be rather complementary than comparable.** This is reported to be the case for Bulgaria, Denmark, Romania, Switzerland, the Slovak Republic and Belgium/Flemish Community. These classifications are generally set through law, and in four of these cases universities can move between classes. Two respondents have commented that even if the initial intention was incomparability across classes, in practice, some classes are perceived as being more/better than others. These classifications serve a major administrative purpose, being grounds for policies in the fields of: defining missions of institutions, differentiated accreditation and quality assurance, fund allocation, recognition, qualifications frameworks or internationalisation. However, being in one class or another is generally associated with specificities of the qualifications offered and activities performed, so these classifications also serve a public information purpose, by enabling those interested to orient themselves towards a certain type of institution. Such classifications can be seen as higher education system-wide transparency tools. They basically target the wider public offering mainly general information.

2. **Multidimensional classifications** which describe the profiles of HEIs without defining specific classes to which HEIs are being assigned to by the issuer. These classifications are user driven, in the sense that they allow for their users to define what is interesting for them and to identify those HEIs that fit their expectations. The survey revealed such a classification in Norway. The "flower project" contains a mix of input and output indicators, grouped on the following dimensions: size, education, research, economy, internationalisation and cooperation with the business sector. The other example (not published yet) of a multidimensional classification, U-Map, was originally developed under EU project funding, it gathered data from higher education institutions in Belgium/Flemish Community, Estonia and the Netherlands, and is currently under extension to Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland. The U-Map classification describes HEIs' diversity under six dimensions, each composed of indicators (3-5 per dimension, 23 in total)[16]: teaching and learning profile, student profile, research involvement, involvement in knowledge exchange, international orientation, and regional engagement. U-Map can be seen as providing transparency across higher education systems. The information it provides will be accessible to all interested persons. U-Map can increase its effectiveness for transparency provided that a significantly large number of higher education institutions join it.

3. **Classifications that assign HEIs to classes which are hierarchically ordered.** The literature revew indicated that such tools were developed recently in Albania and Bulgaria. The respondents to the survey reported such classifications in Germany (CHE University Ranking), Kazakhstan, and the Netherlands (studychoice123.ne)[17]. These classifications were or still are supported at least partially by governments.

[16] *van Vught, F.A., F. Kaiser, J.M. File, C. Gaethgens, R. Peter and D.F. Westerheijden, U-Map: The European Classification of Higher Education Institutions, Enschede, CHEPS, 2010.*

[17] In Germany and the Netherlands the classifications are multidimensional and user driven, so they could have been included under the previous point as well.

CHE University Ranking was considered one of the influential transparency tools across the EHEA. A description of CHE University Ranking and a brief report on its recent development can be found in Annex 3.

The developers of U-Map, the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies from Twente University (the Netherlands), insist on not using the tool for other policy purposes than information provision. They argue that perverse incentives for scoring appropriately would be provided, thus the adequacy of the tool for transparency purposes decreases. This warning can be extended to national rankings as well.

National rankings within the EHEA

Ellen Hazelkorn[18] reports that in Albania and in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", the government has recently embarked on vertical differentiation initiatives. The national authorities have secured technical support from non-domestic actors that also provided them with both expertise and supranational legitimacy. Albania has teamed with CHE (Germany), "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" with Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China). Alex Usher[19] argues that national rankings are sometimes perceived and communicated as a move towards enhancing quality by shedding light on the relative performance of higher education. He identifies similar approaches in developing countries in Africa, South America and South East Asia.

The questionnaire revealed the existence of national commercial rankings in eight EHEA countries, developed mainly by the media. The responses indicate that their impact on student enrolment or the burden they put on HEIs' shoulders have not been evaluated. At the same time, it is reported that these rankings are not influential on domestic policy making.

Research does not provide much additional information on national rankings. Researchers' accounts on the existence and development of national rankings portray different perspectives at different moments in time.

National commercial rankings are a dynamic field that currently does not influence governmental agendas. Governmentally provided or supported national rankings are not wide-spread in the EHEA. National rankings were developed in the period of growth of the international rankings discourse. Correlations between some national initiatives and global rankings can be established on an individual basis.

The risk of improper usage of national rankings should not be underestimated. It seems more likely that those who do not have more than general knowledge about how higher education works would rely on such tools, being attracted by their apparent simplicity.

[18]Ellen Hazelkorn „Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education. The Battle for World Class Exellence", Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
[19]Alex Usher and Paul Jarvey „Let the Sun Shine In: The Use of University Rankings in Low-and Middle-income Countries" Paper Presented at IREG-5 Berlin, Germany, Oct. 7, 2010.

Influential global rankings and the EHEA

Global rankings offer easy and straightforward comparisons between educational alternatives, without appealing to other tools. Their popularity is partialy related to their apparent simplicity, though the risks of misuses[20] are significant. This can be seen as an indication of the fact that they have managed to convince wide audiences that their methodology is statistically rigorous. At the same time, experts warn that there is no such thing as an objective ranking.

Currently, two global rankings have proved influential in the EHEA: Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)[21], and Times Higher Education Thompson Reuters World University Ranking (THE)[22]. They cover only a small minority of institutions within the EHEA[23] and generally target a minority of students who can move with little obstacles between higher education systems. These rankings measure research performance extensively but the insights provided with regards to quality of teaching or regional engagement are not as good. One of the most frequent misuses they induce is not to signal internal variance of performance inside higher education institutions.

Multidimensional rankings, *such as U-Multirank*, promise to resolve some of the built-in shortcoming, by allowing comparisons across different aspects of institutional performance. *CHE Excellence Ranking* addresses criticism in a different way, by being clearer on its audience and more subject specific in its methodology.

THE Thomson Reuters and ARWU can account for improvements in their methodology aimed at increasing accuracy of data and methodologies. ARWU is joining the trend of "democratisation" of rankings, by allowing users to create their own rankings based on a predefined set of dimensions.

Global rankings and transparency policies at national level

The findings of the questionnaire indicate that there are seven countries which acknowledge a significant influence of international rankings in their governmental policies, but not necessary in the field of transparency. It appears that global rankings feature high in the political debates, but rather as a focusing frame for various problems.

The literature review indicates that these global rankings have significantly influenced the design of national rankings. In some cases, transparency tools have been developed also to counteract the homogenising effects of rankings. This is the case for Belgium/Flemish Community and the Netherlands, where a multidimensional approach was taken.

There are also examples of rankings being used as basis for automatic recognition. For international cooperation, the ranks of higher education institutions in one country are sometimes perceived as a proxy for quality of the overall higher education systems.

[20] Criticism against rankings from the perspective of transparency has been outlined in the paragraph on national rankings. The same applies here.
[21] www.arwu.org/index.jsp
[22] www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-univerity-rankings/
[23] Andrejs Rauhvagers „Global University Rankings and Their Impact", The European University Association, 2011.

Global rankings and the Bologna Process

In relation to the Bologna Process, current global rankings appear to be disconnected in terms of transparency, due to their focus on research. One interesting development is to use rankings in order to inform the public on issues related to the social dimension. Three such examples were identified, two of them developed in Europe[23], and one in Canada[24]. They rank higher education systems by measuring issues such as accessibility, affordability, effectiveness or responsiveness. Unfortunately for the social dimension, these are not very popular rankings.

Global rankings' capacity to get the message through can be used for bringing more transparency in fields that do not get attention by current influential global rankings, such as the social dimension or community engagement.

[23] Hazelkorn, E., cit. op.

[24] Alex Usher, Jon Medow, „Global Higher Education Rankings 2010 - Affordability and Accessibility in Comparative Perspective", Octombrie 2010, higheredstrategy.com/publications/GHER2010_FINAL.pdf

Databases

It appears that data on higher education that can be relevant to the stakeholders is collected extensively at national level. Up to now, it is unclear to what extent the data is known by the public and if it is comparable across countries.

At the European level, the Modernisation Agenda published by the European Commission includes a higher education institutions' "census" among the transparency tools to be developed. It is titled the "The European Tertiary Education Register" and its concept is based on a feasibility study concluded with a positive result, entitled "Feasibility study for European University Data Collection - EUMIDA". Its main goal was to test the feasibility of a regular collection of data related to individual institutions in all EU-27 Member States plus Norway and Switzerland. The project has reviewed the issues of data availability, confidentiality, and the resources needed for a full-scale exercise. Its main achievement is to have demonstrated that in all countries a core set of data that can be put together and published to allow for comparison of HEIs across national jurisdictions actually exists. The EUMIDA project carried out two large data collections: one based on a set of core indicators for largely all HEIs delivering at least short cycles or bachelors, ISCED 5 and 6, (2,457 HEIs) the other based on an extended set of indicators for HEIs defined as "research active" (1,364 HEIs).

The collection of data on research active institutions proved to be much more problematic, due to the lack of standardised definitions of some statistical variables (in particular, the breakdown of funding and expenditure by categories), and to the lack of data for many output variables in numerous countries (e.g. publications, patents or spinoff companies). The study also investigated the cost and effort needed to carry out a regular data collection to be developed in the near future. It turned out that the overall workload per national agencies would not increase by more than a few weeks per country, while the effort from Eurostat would be substantial.

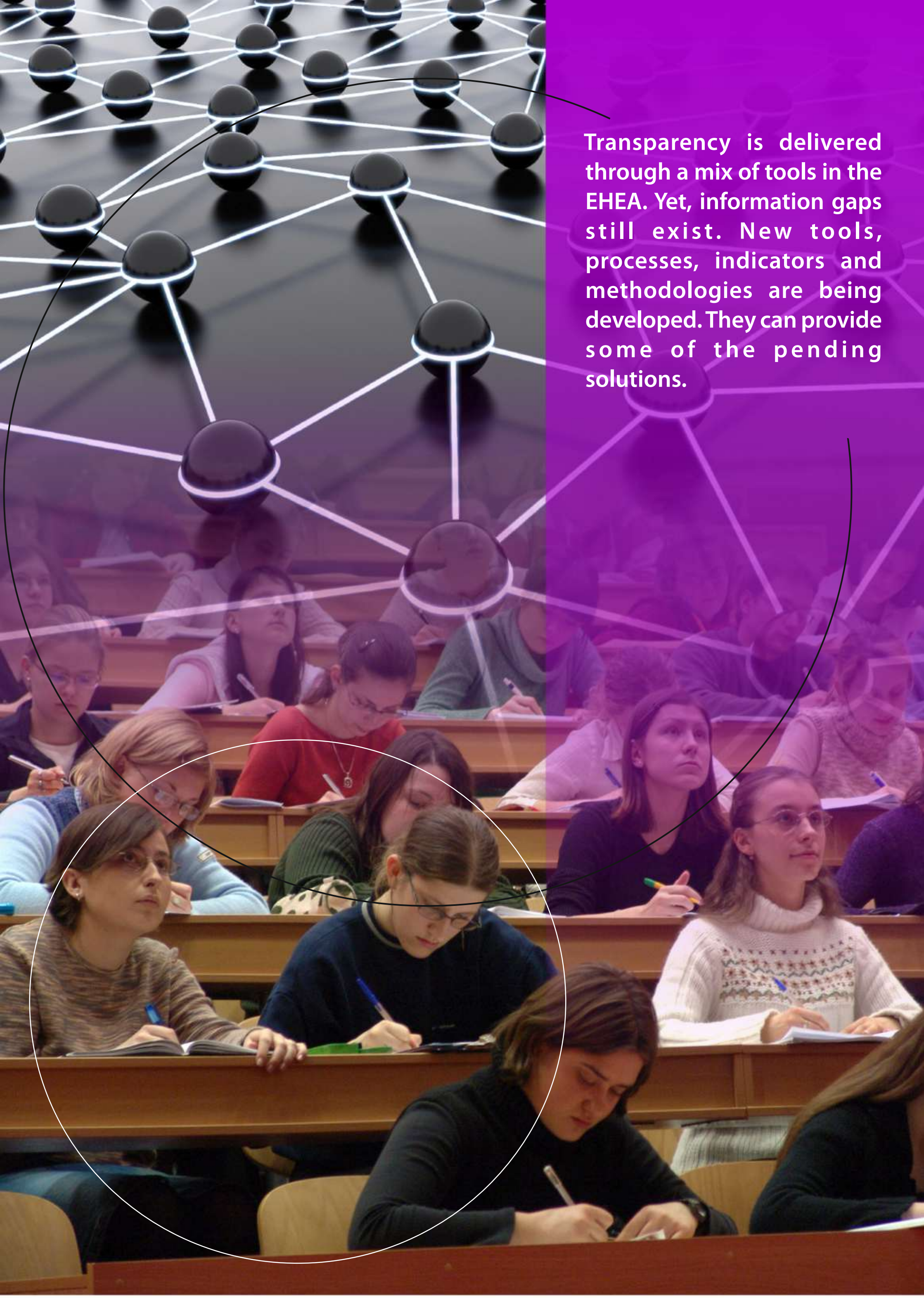
Before moving forward with collecting more data, it may prove to be a rewarding exercise to explore the better use of existing databases.

Novelties that promise to improve transparency

Given the existing gaps in information provision and the shortcomings of the current transparency tools outlined in the text of the report, new approaches were developed. This section[26] of the report briefly introduces such developments, which are of supranational relevance:

[26] This section is informative in its nature, and it does not claim exhaustiveness.

Transparency is delivered through a mix of tools in the EHEA. Yet, information gaps still exist. New tools, processes, indicators and methodologies are being developed. They can provide some of the pending solutions.



- The assessment of the feasibility of measuring and comparing the achieved learning outcomes for first cycle (undergraduate) students at international level. The OECD is running such a feasibility study entitled Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO);

- The development of a user-driven, multidimensional ranking that would measure performance in teaching, research, knowledge exchange, internationalisation and regional engagement. It uses a classification to compare only those higher education institutions which are comparable. It is promoted as U-Multirank and it is part of the "Modernisation Agenda" of the European Commission;

- The European Tertiary Education Register is developed to collect data from national statistical offices. Two sets of data are to be collected: data on core activities for all tertiary education institutions and data on research for the research active ones. It is part of the "Modernisation Agenda" of the European Commission and its concept was proved feasible by the EUMIDA project;

- The auditing of rankings against "The Berlin Principles of Rankings Higher Education Institutions". The initiative belongs to the Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (IREG);

- The development of indicators for higher education institutions' third mission. Additionally, a Data Base of European Third Mission Providers was set up, building on four indicators that were considered as being strategic. The innitiative was developed within the E3M project - European Indicators And Ranking Methodology For University Third Mission, financed by the European Commission.

Continuous monitoring of such initiatives would prove relevant for understanding the evolution of the mix of tools that deliver transparency in the EHEA, as well as for identifying the remaining gaps in terms of information or ability to understand and use it.

As an example, student and graduate tracking have so far received very little attention in the Bologna Process. There seems to be a wealth of approaches regarding student and graduate tracking, in use or under development in different parts of Europe. Tracking may produce data and analysis that reflect rather directly the outcomes of learning and teaching (student and graduate success and progression). Such data and analysis could fill in some of the information gaps regarding the quality of teaching and learning. A detailed study comprising country mapping and analysis of different tracking approaches will be published by EUA in autumn 2012.

[27] Following on the results of the Trackit Project, undertaken by the European University Association (EUA); Irish Universities Association/ UCD Geary Institute; Hochschul-Informations-System GmBH (HIS); Lund University; University of the Peloponnese/ Centre for Social and Educational Policy Studies; Aarhus University with the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union (www.eua.be/trackit)

Conclusions

Currently, in the EHEA there are different tools, structures, and processes that contribute to enabling understanding of both cross-border and domestic higher education diversity. It seems rather unlikely that a single transparency tool can address all needs for information regarding higher education; hence the logical way forward is to look for the appropriate mix of tools. The national governments' perceptions of the current transparency tools are varied.

Some of the existing transparency tools, structures and processes were developed in the governmental and intergovernmental realm, but there are also other demands for information that are met using tools developed by non-governmental entities. In most cases, it may prove more beneficial to look for synergies between these tools, rather than trying to replace the ones with the others. The merits of the market have to be acknowledged, while the governments remain the custodians of the public interest also in the sphere of transparency.

The Bologna tools, structures and processes have the potential to significantly increase the EHEA level of transparency. But even if they realise their full potential, information gaps still remain, mainly regarding the substantive educational experience (issues like student mentoring and support, as well as the quality of teaching), and the employability of graduates. Meaningful comparison between educational alternatives is not easy, especially regarding the quality of teaching, and the regional and community engagement of higher education institutions.

There are also comprehensive data sources at national level, which can generate information that may be found relevant by the beneficiaries of higher education institutions. A better use of the national databases may contribute to filling in some of the information gaps.

New tools, processes, indicators and methodologies are being developed, at national and supra-national level. They can provide some of the pending solutions. Therefore, the recommendations touch upon continuing the monitoring of transparency tools and on developing common understanding and guidelines for transparency at EHEA level.

Annex1

List of responding countries to the transparency tools questionnaire

Andorra

Armenia

Austria

Belgium – Flemish Community

Belgium – French Community

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Bulgaria

Croatia

Cyprus

Czech Republic

Denmark

Estonia

Finland

France

Germany

Iceland

Ireland

Italy

Kazakhstan

Latvia

Liechtenstein

Lithuania

Malta

Moldova

Montenegro

Netherlands

Norway

Poland

Portugal

Slovak Republic

Slovenia

Spain

Switzerland

Turkey

United Kingdom

Annex 2

Intended purpose (in terms of information provision)	Link with other Bologna Process tools, structures or/and processes	Target audience (in terms of information provision) and how do they inform decisions?	How can strengths be identified?	Issues affecting effectiveness as transparency tool*	Fitness for (transparency) purpose
Quality assurance					
„External quality assurance procedures may cover a wide spectrum of processes designed to monitor, maintain and enhance quality; they provide information about the fulfilment of quality standards as a basis for accreditation. Quality assurance helps the public to distinguish between accredited and non-accredited study programmes. Quality assurance can also enable detailed qualitative comparison of programmes or institutions. Other important information may be produced in the process of internal quality assurance.	Higher education institutions should include in their internal quality assurance processes the way learning outcomes are written and how their achievement is assessed. Quality assured credentials are suitable for academic recognition. Qualification frameworks include references to the state of accreditation of a study programme or HEI.	Accreditation provides a yes or no (sometimes also yes under specific conditions) reference for the public. In particular students, their families and employers benefit from this publically available information. Quality assurance provides comprehensive information about strengths and weaknesses and thus a holistic view on the quality of a study programme or an institution. It can also have provide input for quality enhancement. Internal quality assurance provides information rather for the academic community. Students, employers and the general public may also benefit of such information, provided that it is published with no biases due to marketing issues.	Quality assurance provides comprehensive information about strengths and weaknesses and thus, a holistic view on the quality of a program (ENQA Position Paper on Transparency Tools, 2011) It helps to identify: · The link between processes and quality; · The link between evaluation of quality (including weaknesses and strengths) and recommendations for future actions.	Quality assurance information is many times complex and specialised. The general public may have problems in making use of it. Not all reports are entirely published; sometimes it is only a short resume and the accreditation verdict in the public domain. Negative reports tend to be published less widely than positive ones. The diversity of procedures and practices can hamper the international comparability of quality assurance reports.	Quality assurance is particularly useful for provision of detailed information about type/profile/quality of institutions/study programmes within the same higher education system, but may be not the best tool to enable comparisons between alternative educational solutions. Recommendations: 1. To publish summaries of all quality assurance reports, be them positive or negative, in the size and language that makes them understandable and appealing to the public. 2. To develop European framework for the way quality assurance reports are being written

* Most of the judgements in this column are grounded on the 2012 and 2009 reports on the implementation of the Bologna Process

Intended purpose (in terms of information provision)	Link with other Bologna Process tools, structures or/and processes	Target audience (in terms of information provision) and how do they inform decisions?	How can strengths be identified?	Issues affecting effectiveness as transparency tool	Fitness for (transparency) purpose
ENQA and EQAR membership					
To testify that quality assurance agencies operate in accordance with the ESG.	EQAR lists the quality assurance agencies that are operating in line with the ESG. ENQA is an association whose members are quality assurance agencies which operate in line with the ESG;	These structures are perceived as being rather geared towards public authorities that deal with higher education issues. The general public needs to have basic knowledge on ESG, ENQA and EQAR to understand which are the motives for granting or rejecting membership. Because of this reason, the audience of these tools appears limited to the specialized ones.	These tools do not indicate strengths or weaknesses.	Not all agencies that operate in line with the ESG in the EHEA are listed in EQAR.	
Recognition					
According to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (2007), each country has to: · maintain and publish information on HE system; · provide information on individual qualifications, programmes and HEIs upon request; · establish an ENIC centre which provides the above information and cooperates with other ENIC centres.	Within the Bologna Process, ECTS, learning outcomes and the level in the qualifications frameworks, Diploma Supplement are seen as recognition tools. Quality assurance is seen as a safeguard for the conditions which enable recognition to take place.	The information function is an auxiliary consequence of recognition, not its intended purpose. Recognition should be based on the Bologna tools, primarily ECTS, learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks. Such tools do carry a substantial information load. Students can use recognition as a collateral criterion: they can opt for those study programmes that are easily recognisable. Governments and employers: it provides a recognised (academic) guarantee of the adequacy of a foreign degree/ qualification to local/national demands.	Recognition procedures and decisions do not refer to strengths and weaknesses of programmes or institutions.	The implementation ECTS, learning outcomes and Diploma Supplement has a great impact on the effectiveness of recognition itself and as a transparency tool.	Recognition was not initially intended for transparency purposes. However, it can be used by students choosing amongst alternative study programmes/HEIs.

Intended purpose (in terms of information provision)	Link with other Bologna Process tools, structures or/and processes	Target audience (in terms of information provision) and how do they inform decisions?	How can strengths be identified?	Issues affecting effectiveness as transparency tool[1]	Fitness for (transparency) purpose
Degree system					
"[…] Adoption of a system based on two cycles, the first, of three years at least, spendable on the European labour market and in the higher education system as an adequate level of qualification " (Bologna Declaration, 1999)	The three cycles are described through learning outcomes, ECTS credits and, qualification levels. The Dublin descriptors are general statements of the expected attributes of a student following completion of a respective cycle award. They were elaborated by the Joint Quality initiative.	Students: it provides a general structure for educational paths. It enables their orientation towards a certain segment of the educational path. Employers: it helps them classify job applicants' credentials in three groups: bachelor, master, doctorate. Faculty: the degree system has become common language in HEIs and they are probably perceived more in terms of administrative acts that are based on the distinction between cycles. The structure was further refined through the qualifications frameworks. They carry a bigger information load, together with ECTS.	Degree system enables generic understanding of higher education progression. This tool does not refer to strengths and weaknesses of programmes or institutions. They also do not enable comprehensive understanding of higher education structures (study programmes, qualifications, courses etc.)	Sometimes, when study programmes are ascribed to a specific cycle, national/institutional academic traditions prevail in the face of the logic of the Dublin descriptors and of the qualifications frameworks. Inconsistencies in degree system implementation erode its efficiency for information provision. Sometimes the interpretation of "pre Bologna" degrees can be ambiguous.	The degree system has become part of common knowledge; it enables the orientation towards a specific cycle. It is complemented by qualifications frameworks. The degree system is not useful for the selection from a range of alternative study programmes.
ECTS					
„Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility." (Bologna Declaration, 1999). ECTS aims to enable both transfer and accumulation of credits.	ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. The first two Bologna cycles are associated with the following ECTS credit ranges: First cycle qualifications typically include 180-240 ECTS credits. Second cycle qualifications typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 ECTS credits at the level of the 2nd cycle.	Students and families: it indicates the learning effort needed to achieve a qualification. It is also useful for recognition of accumulation in case of mobility or non-traditional learning. It can be used by students to choose the alternative that leads to the same qualification with the least effort. Or it can be used to choose the alternative that leads to the most desired learning outcomes with the same effort. Faculty and administration of HEIs: it can be used as a tool for structuring learning experiences and as a grid for recognition.	ECTS was developed to enable understanding of the learning effort and to structure educational paths based on the learning effort. ECTS does not refer to strengths and weaknesses of programmes and institutions. Its intended purpose was not to enable choices between alternatives.	Different grounds are used for ECTS allocation across EHEA: student workload, contact hours, learning outcomes or a combination of them. The link with learning outcomes is problematic in many EHEA countries. Student workload was found difficult to measure. Some countries saw the "floating" value of 1 ECTS credit (25-30 hours of student work) as a problem and they determined a fixed value. The differences in ECTS implementation may erode its efficiency for EHEA wide transparency.	If implemented properly, ECTS is fit for providing an ex ante perspective on the effort needed to obtain specific learning outcomes at higher education level. For EHEA wide transparency, ECTS needs to have a common basis of calculation.

Intended purpose (in terms of information provision)	Link with other Bologna Process tools, structures or/and processes	Target audience (in terms of information provision) and how do they inform decisions?	How can strengths be identified?	Issues affecting effectiveness as transparency tool[1]	Fitness for (transparency) purpose
Diploma supplement					
"Adoption of a system of degrees easily readable and comparable also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement in order to promote […] employability and the international competitiveness […]" (Bologna Declaration, 1999)	It consists of: Status of institution and programme Level of qualification Official duration of programme Access requirements Mode of studies Programme requirements Programme details Description of HE system	Graduates: to offer comprehensive information about their educational achievements in a single paper that they can carry with them. It enables them straight-forward referencing of their academic background. National authorities and HEIs: to facilitate the recognition of an academic degree/ professional qualification. However, the stocktaking report 2009 points to the fact that diploma supplement is often required to be "supplemented" by other administrative documents. Employers: to ensure transparency of the qualification and of the academic progress for facilitating the employment process. It enables them to contrast information on the academic background of individual job applicants.	Diploma Supplements as such do not refer to strengths and weaknesses of programmes and institutions. However, the transcripts of records may be an indirect source for this kind of information.	The Diploma Supplements in many cases are not prepared properly and hence do not provide the expected information to the users. There is a substantial number of countries which fail to issue diploma supplements to all their graduates or/and to issue it automatically. In some countries, fees are charged for the issuing of DS. The language of the document is another issue. Timing can be another problem: Diploma Supplement can be issued after the application period.	The purpose of Diploma Supplement is to offer a reference of the academic background. It can be a very useful tool for graduates; it did not aim to inform prospective students. On the practical side, many students and employers do not know about the diploma supplement. Due to this fact and to improper issuing, DS is not providing the transparency it is expected from it. Different definitions of learning outcomes across countries and the language issues reduce its EHEA wide capacity for transparency.
Qualifications frameworks					
„[S]hould seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile" (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). They should be „facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between, higher education systems" (London Communiqué, 2007). Essentially, a national framework is a mechanism through which all relevant learning achievements may bemeasured and related to each other in a coherent way against a structure that takes into account the levels of qualification and associated workload.	Learning outcomes are important descriptors for qualifications. Only quality assured qualifications should be part of the NQFs. QF should make recognition more transparent and logical. The qualification can be seen multi-dimensionally, as they describe qualifications': - level; - profile; - learning outcomes and their assessment; - workload (ECTS).	Students and families: to compare and contrast the study choices in terms of level of qualification, effort to gain it and the associated progression opportunities. It enables them to locate study programmes within the national higher education study framework and to construct educational paths. Employers: to better understand the tertiary education qualifications presented/ required for employment. Faculty and administration of HEIs: to reference and describe study programmes against a single framework. General public: it provides a structure of quality assured qualifications.	Qualifications frameworks do not refer to strengths and weaknesses of programmes and institutions.	Profile description is less developed. Comparison of study programmes leading to the same qualifications may need to rest on characteristics outside the qualification frameworks. Their effectiveness depends on a large extent on the meaningful implementation of learning outcomes and ECTS.	Qualifications frameworks are a very promising tool for transparency, but their fitness for purpose cannot be evaluated for the moment.

Intended purpose (in terms of information provision)	Link with other Bologna Process tools, structures or/and processes	Target audience (in terms of information provision) and how do they inform decisions?	How can strengths be identified?	Issues affecting effectiveness as transparency tool[1]	Fitness for (transparency) purpose
Learning outcomes					
Learning outcomes are statements on what the learner is expected to ***know, understand and be able to do*** at the end of a period of learning. They categorise learning outcomes into knowledge, skills and competence.	Learning outcomes are used as grounds for assigning levels in qualifications frameworks. They are also used in the calculation of ECTS and are used to describe qualifications in the Diploma Supplement.	Students and families: to contrast the study choices in terms of specific achievements. Together with ECTS credits, learning outcomes provide a detailed overview of the study programme, while quality assurance completes the information with the perspective on the whole institution. Employers: to better understand what lies behind university credentials. Faculty and administrators: to structure their learning processes.	Learning outcomes enable to identify if a study programme leads to the desired objectives. It can be used to contrast alternatives.	They enable comparison between educational alternatives to the extent to which the specific learning outcomes are comparable. Learning outcomes are defined in multiple ways, some of them compatible with each other, some of them not necessarily compatible. It is questionable how far those definitions are known, understood and actually applied in practice.	Learning outcomes are the Bologna tools developed to provide a substantive description of learning.
Bologna Stocktaking/ assessment / Reporting					
The Bologna Stocktaking reports were drafted for Ministerial Conferences in 2005, 2007 and 2009 and they had as a main aim to provide an overview of EHEA countries' success according to agreed criteria. The 2012 reporting exercise also includes statistical analyses based on Eurostat, Eurydice and Eurostudent data.	The Bologna Stocktaking/ Reporting exercise offers comparative information for evidence based decision-making.	Students: they will find such information useful only if they have a civic or research driven interest in the Bologna Process. Governments, policy makers and policy experts: the information provided by these tools enable further decision-making at EHEA and national level and facilitate the formulation of policy responses. Higher education institutions' leadership and administrators: the information provided by these reports can help institutions to identify partners with a desired profile, especially in terms of the level of implementation of Bologna tools, processes and structures.	The stocktaking reports do not refer to strengths and weaknesses of programmes and institutions. The two exercises also facilitate the readability of the structures within the national systems and often bring forward the measures which are put in place/ planned to further the implementation of the Bologna Process.	These exercises do not target students, their families or faculty. The quality of the report depends on the accuracy of the data provided by the EHEA members, as well as on the data collection capabilities across the EHEA member states.	It ensures a detailed and effective picture of the level of implementation of the Bologna Process across the EHEA countries, which is useful both for the EHEA governments and stakeholder organisations, as well as for the non-EHEA organised actors. However, it was mainly directed towards the evaluation of policies, and less towards assessing if the problems were solved. It aids only marginally individual decisions regarding higher education.

Annex3

CHE University Ranking[28] is mainly an instrument for improving student choice that has proved to influence both national and international rankings. It compares only fields of study, not entire institutions. It is multi-dimensional, meaning that, for a given subject, no overall value is derived from weighted individual indicators. This allows users to create their personalized rankings, based on their interests. The results are displayed as three ranking groups, namely top group, middle group and end group. This option was chosen in order to avoid the misinterpretation of minor differences in the nominal value indicator as differences in performance and quality. Another CHE hallmark is that it is partially grounded on a survey on student satisfaction. The major development of CHE University Ranking in the past period is the introduction of rating indicators for internationalisation and employability. Rating means that universities are not ordered linearly (and then ranked into groups based on this order) but assessed against pre-defined standards. CHE University Ranking covers German speaking fields of study in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

The U-Map classification describes HEIs' diversity under six dimensions, each composed of indicators (3-5 per dimension, 23 in total)[29]: teaching and learning profile (degree level focus, subject range, degree orientation, expenditure on teaching); student profile (mature, part-time, distance, size of student body); research involvement (publications, doctorate production, research expenditures); involvement in knowledge exchange (start-ups, patents, cultural activities, income from knowledge exchange); international orientation (international students, incoming students in international exchange, outgoing students, international staff, income from international sources); and regional engagement (graduates working in the region, junior students from the region, income from local sources).

THE Thomson Reuters focuses on five categories of indicators: teaching (30%), research (30%), citations (32.5%), economic/innovation (2.5%), international diversity (5%). Maybe the main development is collecting data through two separate reputation surveys, one for research and one for teaching. The parity between disciplinary fields was increased and corrections for the size of the institution were operated. In addition, Thomson Reuters collects data for its Global Institutional Profiles Project, which is used to create detailed profiles of higher education institutions and to build the annual THE tables.

ARWU was initially conceived as a means by which Chinese universities could benchmark their performance against the top universities around the world. It covers quality of education (10%), quality of faculty (40%) and research output (50%). Most of the developments within ARWU are targeting extensions of the data on which the ranking is based, including more international scientific awards (possibly one from each subject area) and including more internationally renowned alumni (executives in top companies and international organisations). Additionally, a tool called "Profiling Research Universities" is being developed. Based on it, ARWU has developed an extension called "Ranking Lab", which allows for users to derive their own rankings, by rating the relevance of 21 indicators.

Another ranking that addresses some of the criticism to global rankings is **CHE Excellence Ranking**. This ranking is for European higher education institutions and it ranks only high achievers in specific fields, where achievement is calculated on an empirical basis. The CHE

[28] www.che.de

[29] van Vught, F.A., F. Kaiser, J.M. File, C. Gaethgens, R. Peter and D.F. Westerheijden, U-Map: The European Classification of Higher Education Institutions, Enschede, CHEPS, 2010.

Excellence Ranking targets students who want to enroll for PhD studies and it looks at research and internationalisation, but also at students' satisfaction and gender balance. It is discipline based, covering biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics (in two sequences: 2007, and 2010), political science, psychology, and economics in 2009. It presents results as three clusters, which are hierarchically ordered.

AHELO[30] feasibility study (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes) addresses the lack of comparative data on the achieved learning outcomes. It assesses whether it is possible to measure and compare internationally what undergraduate degree students know and can do upon graduation. The project entails an evaluation of the scientific feasibility of carrying out an international assessment of achieved learning outcomes (in generic and subject-specific skills) at the end of a Bachelor's degree programme, as well as gauging the feasibility of its practical implementation. To do so, the work unfolded in two phases, the first one devoted to proving the conceptual feasibility, and the second one focusing on proving the scientific and practical feasibility. The first phase assessed the feasibility of devising assessment frameworks and instruments that have sufficient validity in various national, linguistic, cultural and institutional contexts. The second phase addressed issues of practical feasibility, further investigated validity issues and assessed data reliability. For both phases, two subjects were chosen as pilot: economics and civil engineering. AHELO was developed by the OECD and its results will ground the decision of whether to launch a full-fledged study in the longer term.

U-Multirank[31] addresses important criticism to the architecture of rankings. It claims that it empowers users by allowing them to select the indicators they are interested in and associate them with their preferred weightings in order to compare institutions along each dimension. There are no composite scores or an institutional league table. The project aims to lay emphasis on the diversity of activities higher education institutions may prioritise, by looking at teaching, research, knowledge exchange, internationalisation and regional engagement. It aims to account for internal institutional diversity, therefore it is designed to allow institutional and field-based ranking. It builds on the experience of CHE University Ranking and uses a classification to determine which institutions are comparable. According to their own evaluation, U-Multirank fares better than traditional international rankings, especially in regards to the user-driven approach. It also includes more dimensions of higher education performance and it was developed by means of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

U-Multirank is portrayed by researchers[32] as the efforts of a supranational entity to develop rankings in the interest of its collective membership. In this respect, U-Multirank features prominent in the "Communication on the Modernisation Agenda" of the European Commission in regards to transparency provision.

The International Ranking Expert Group (IREG)[33] initiated a process of **auditing rankings** based on the operationalisation of the *Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions[34]*. The initiative aims to enhance the transparency of rankings, and to give users of rankings a tool for identifying trustworthy rankings and improving their quality. The audit is based on self-reporting and peer assessment, including written questions and on-site visits. The audit decision rests with the Executive Committee of IREG. This development addresses the criticism

[30] http://www.oecd.org/document/22/0,3746,en_2649_35961291_40624662_1_1_1_1,00.html
[31] http://www.u-multirank.eu/
[32] Hazelkorn, E., cit. op.
[33] http://www.ireg-observatory.org/
[34] http://www.ireg-observatory.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=41&Itemid=48

that the methodologies of international rankings, especially those of the most popular league tables, still lack transparency themselves[35].

The **E3M project - European Indicators And Ranking Methodology For University Third Mission** has looked into mapping the third mission and defining specific indicators for it. Based on a Delphi study, a list of 52 indicators was identified and grouped in three dimensions: continuing education, technology transfer and innovation, and social engagement. Three strategic indicators were put forward:

- A general one: "Institutional commitment to the third mission", which consists in the acknowledgement in some recognisable form that the institution exists to serve the society, in its formal mission or strategy (1= weak; 5=strong);
- For continuing education: "Presence of continuing education" which consists in the proportion of such activities in the total teaching activity (quantifiable in Full Time Equivalent Students, or percent);
- For technology transfer, a revenue indicator that consists in the proportion of HEI total turnover derived from research/development contracts, collaborative projects with non-academic partners, commercial TTI activity, etc. (quantifiable in Euros, or percent);
- For social engagement, a value indicator calculated as the average value, per person, of the time donated in delivering services to the external community (in Euros per staff and student member, calculated at national minimum hourly wage, or equivalent).

The project also set the basis for a the construction of a database of European Third Mission Providers that aims at providing accounts of institutional mission statement on third mission, activties within the three dimensions, and values for strategic indicators.

[35]Rauhvagers, A., 2011, cit. op.

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The Bologna Process is meant to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe. Between 1999 - 2010, members' efforts of the Bologna Process were targeted to creating the European Higher Education Area, that was launched through the Budapest-Vienna Declaration of March, 2010. The second decade is aimed at consolidating the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Process builds on the voluntary involvement of governments, European and international institutions and stakeholder organisations, with support from European data collectors.

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