

15 October 2004

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**UNICE'S POSITION AND EXPECTATIONS****Summary**

The more than 40 European states that participate in the Bologna Process have agreed on the creation of a common **European higher education area** by the year 2010.

European employers **welcome this development** and fully support the goals of the Bologna Process:

- In light of the growing internationalisation of **labour markets** and the evolving demands on the **competences and qualifications** of graduates, UNICE considers the goals of the Bologna Process – when implemented – to be a reliable framework for preparing students for professional activities.
- The consistent realisation of the credit point system, the Europe-wide introduction of the Diploma Supplement as well as the transparency of the study content will improve the comparability of learning outcomes. Therefore Europe's employers support these instruments. Indeed, transparency and compatibility are important in order to facilitate student **mobility**, the **flexibility** of study courses and **permeability** between the different branches of (higher) education.
- The Bologna Process makes it possible to intensify **cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises** and, in addition to cooperation in the field of research, to follow common goals in other areas such as quality assurance.

To turn the Bologna Process into a real success, it is key that the Bologna objectives and priorities are realised through implementation of measures at national and institutional level. In addition it is indispensable that all stakeholders (including employers) are involved in **three major fields**:

- 1) It is necessary to develop a system of **comparable quality requirements**. The course towards comparable and reliable quality assurance, as set by the participating states and higher education institutions, must be continued.
- 2) Courses of study need to be conceived with regard to the **employability of graduates** in international labour markets. Extensive employability of graduates needs to be ensured. Dialogue between higher education institutions and business about the relevant labour-market-related competences and qualifications must be intensified.
- 3) **High quality student and teacher mobility** has to be ensured. Study abroad should be regarded as an internal part of regular study courses and should not lead to a prolongation of regular study periods. The increase in mobility needs to be monitored closely by higher education institutions and states.

15 October 2004

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**UNICE'S POSITION AND EXPECTATIONS****I. UNICE welcomes and supports the goals of the Bologna Process**

1. The more than 40 European states that participate in the Bologna Process have agreed on the creation of a common European higher education area by the year 2010. The most important **goals** connected to the so called Bologna Declaration, which are being discussed intensively in higher education institutions and in politics and which are being realised step by step, are:

- Introduction of a **two-tier higher education system** with the internationally recognised degrees "bachelor" as the first degree after 3 to 4 years of study and the "master" as a possible second degree after an additional 1 to 2 years of study.
- Introduction of a **diploma supplement** as an addition to the regular diploma, which will provide information on the profile, length and contents of the completed studies.
- Introduction of a Europe-wide compatible **credit point system** for courses (ECTS: European Credit Transfer System) which will create transparency and improve student mobility.
- Stimulation of the **exchange of students and teachers** within Europe through the elimination of remaining obstacles that hinder mobility.
- Promotion of European cooperation on the subject of **quality assurance**.

2. European employers welcome this development and fully support the goals of the Bologna Process:

- In light of the growing internationalisation of labour markets and the evolving demands on the competences and qualifications of graduates UNICE considers the goals of the Bologna Process – when implemented – to be a reliable framework for preparing students for professional activities.
- Consistent realisation of the credit point system, the Europe-wide introduction of the Diploma Supplement as well as the transparency of the study content will improve the comparability of learning outcomes. Therefore Europe's employers support these instruments. Indeed, transparency and compatibility are important in order to facilitate student mobility, the flexibility of study courses and permeability between the different branches of (higher) education.
- The Bologna Process makes it possible to intensify the cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises and, in addition to cooperation in the field of research, to follow common goals in other areas such as quality assurance

II. Making the Bologna Process a success – Business requests

3. To turn the Bologna Process into a real success, it is key that the Bologna objectives and priorities – supplemented at the Berlin conference – are realized through implementation of measures at national and institutional level. In addition it is indispensable that all stakeholders (including employers) are involved in **three major fields**:
 - a) it is necessary to develop a system of comparable quality requirements,
 - b) study courses need to be conceived with regard to the employability of graduates in international labour markets and
 - c) student and teacher mobility has to be ensured.
4. To ensure that the new study structure, new degrees and the new content of study courses receive broad acceptance on the European labour market, it is necessary for **business to become involved** in the different working groups managing the Bologna Process. The importance to include all social and economic partners in the process was recognised by Ministers in the Berlin Communiqué adopted in 2003.

a) First field of cooperation: quality assurance

*The course towards comparable and reliable **quality assurance**, as set by the participating states and higher education institutions, must be continued. This is a prerequisite to ensure transparency of the outcomes of higher education institutions, which will gain more autonomy in the future.*

5. Employers underline that **quality assurance** starts when students enter the institution in question. The requirements of the study course and the profile of the applicant need to correspond as far as possible so that the student will be able to attain his desired goals within the allocated timeframe and achieve excellent study results. Apart from selection mechanisms, institutions should support students at this stage with the necessary information, and provide orientation and support systems.
6. When changing to the two-tier system, the quality of **study courses** offered by a higher education institution should be reviewed in its entirety. This includes an orientation towards the output as well as a review of the educational results.
7. In our opinion, quality assurance is best achieved through a system of **external experts and peers** combined with an internally developed quality culture. All stakeholders – including representatives from the professional world (business, employer organisations) – should be involved in this system.
8. Regardless of the method of quality assurance, certain elements of that process need to be guaranteed. Important requirements for reliable quality assurance are **comparable and valid criteria** which sufficiently address aspects such as employability and practical relevance, quality management and internal evaluation as well as internationality. All participants in research, business and politics need to cooperate in this regard.
9. At national level, it is necessary to incorporate these criteria in a **clear framework**, which guarantees their uniform application. Furthermore higher education and quality assurance institutions should develop a **common framework at European level** which allows applied national criteria to be compared.

b) Second field of cooperation: employability of graduates

*It must be a common objective to improve the **employability** of graduates and to assure a continuous updating by offering attractive lifelong learning programmes and facilities. Dialogue between higher education institutions and business about the relevant labour-market-related competences and qualifications must be intensified.*

10. A minimum of three years of training for a **bachelor degree** will have to sufficiently qualify the graduate for a professional or self-employed occupation.
11. A three-year bachelor degree (180 ECTS) should give a student **broad professional basic knowledge** and competencies but probably can not teach highly specified knowledge. With a four-year bachelor degree (240 ECTS) or within a binary system of higher education (such as in the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Germany, Denmark and others) it is possible to give students a more specific knowledge and the curriculum could give more scientific depth; hence, these bachelor degrees can be differentiated into more practical or more research-oriented degrees. This possible differentiation depends on the profile of the higher education institution in question and the study courses offered.
12. Master programmes should in principle be **designed in two ways**: further specialisation in a specific field (as continuation of a bachelor programme) or as interdisciplinary study programmes broadening academic qualifications. Master studies should be offered as full study courses or as a modular programme especially designed for (employed) adult learners in order to support lifelong learning. It is key that permeability from Bachelor degrees to Master degrees is guaranteed to support mobility between higher education institutions.
13. Within study courses it is necessary to teach cross-disciplinary qualifications (methodological, social and personal competences) in addition to the regular course-related knowledge. In the view of the employers, a person with a bachelor degree will only succeed on the labour market if subject-specific and **cross-disciplinary education goals** are equally followed and reached. Cross-disciplinary competences need to be developed simultaneously and need to be practiced in tangible situations.
14. Higher education institutions should make use of the possibility of differentiation of the **study course profiles** as foreseen in the Bologna Process. This not only allows for the sharpening of the respective institutions' very own profile but also complies with the demands of the labour market. Practice-related courses of study will primarily prepare for employment in a company whereas research related courses of study will mainly be focused on a later scientific career in public or private research facilities.
15. Independent of the profile of each study course or higher education institution, employability also relies on cross-disciplinary qualifications. Among these **indispensable cross-disciplinary qualifications and competences**, which also need to be included in a quality assurance review process, are:
 - An appropriate level of verbal and written articulacy in the national language
 - An appropriate level of verbal and written articulacy in at least one foreign language (preferably English for non-native speakers)
 - Ability to work in a team
 - Research and work techniques
 - Moderation and feedback techniques
 - Presentation techniques
 - Analytical abilities

- Coherent thinking
- General method competence
- Creativity and flexibility in the application of knowledge, experience and methods
- Realisation competence
- Entrepreneurial thinking and acting
- Intercultural understanding and competence
- Continuous learning ability (Lifelong learning)
- ICT literacy

16. The **professional world** needs to be integrated in higher education to the largest possible extent. This does not solely mean the completion of internships as regular parts of study programmes but also the inclusion of teachers with a professional background. Case studies are a good method to combine theory and practice. In addition, there should already be close cooperation with representatives of the professional practice during the conception of study courses. This is especially important in regard to practice-oriented study courses. Programme councils can be helpful in quickly communicating changes in different professional practices to the respective institutions, guaranteeing a continuous improvement of study courses.

17. In the opinion of employers, the **international orientation** of the courses is indispensable. This includes foreign language segments as well as the widest possible integration of foreign teachers and a high number of foreign students. Student mobility should be regarded as an integral part of study, and teacher mobility as a regular part of career development.

c) Third field of cooperation: mobility

*The increase in student and teacher **mobility** needs to be promoted closely by higher education institutions and states; studies abroad must not translate into a prolongation of regular course periods.*

18. The introduction and development of **joint degrees** or double degrees which result from close cooperation between higher education institutions across national boundaries and allows an effective pooling of expertise needs to be accelerated.
19. **Semesters abroad** or study time abroad should be regarded as a regular part of higher education and should increasingly be integrated in courses; this explicitly includes internships abroad.
20. Similarly, the **integration of foreign teachers** in courses needs to become a natural option. The international mobility of teachers and cooperation among them should not be limited to research but should also extend to teaching.
21. National governments are especially called upon to **discard regulations** which limit or complicate the development of international cooperation and exchanges.
22. In order to assure a certain level of transparency and comparability of the study achievements while also improving student mobility, many higher education institutions have begun to offer their study courses in the form of **modules**. Employers believe this to be useful as it also supports the cross-disciplinary structuring of higher education as well as being a useful precondition for Lifelong learning-friendly study programmes. Each unit of the course should be defined with regard to its significance and its contribution to the goals of the entire study course.

23. When courses are being developed, **ECTS credit points** need to be taken into account as indicators of the invested study time. The educational goals connected to a specific course unit are tied to the estimated effort needed for its completion. As a result, students are enabled to continuously expand and simultaneously assess their study achievements. The introduction of credit points allows the higher education institutions an improved definition of teaching and learning achievements as well as an improved comparability of study achievements within Europe.
24. To guarantee at least a minimum of transparency, the **inflation of titles and degrees** must be strictly avoided.
25. As a result of the introduction of the **diploma supplement**, employers also receive the required and requested additional information about the profile of each type of higher education and the individual performance of the graduate.

III. Conclusion

26. European employers support the goals of the Bologna Process, since they regard it as a historic opportunity to realise a European higher education area which is distinguished by high quality standards, attractiveness of study programmes and international competitiveness. In order to realise a European higher education area, further efforts have to be set, in particular in the implementation of these goals at national and institutional level.
27. Employers offer their support to this process. An important prerequisite for successful realisation of the Bologna Process is the inclusion of business as it will be the future workplace for the majority of graduates. This was recognised by Ministers in the Berlin Communiqué adopted in 2003 which called for the inclusion of all social and economic partners. Furthermore it is necessary to communicate the Bologna Process, its targets and the need for this ongoing change to companies, since their acceptance of the new structure, in particular the new degree programmes, is crucial for the success of a European higher education area.
28. In order to progress towards the realisation of a common European higher education area, broad agreement at the next European conference of ministers responsible for higher education in Bergen/Norway in May 2005 should be achieved on the need to have functioning quality assurance systems in all signatory states linked to common framework at European level, on the need to develop a European qualification framework taking into account existing national qualification frameworks, and on concrete measures to increase the international attractiveness of European higher education.
29. Alongside the Bologna Process there are several more Europe-wide processes and strategies within the field of research, education and training. The European research framework programme and the Copenhagen Process concerning vocational training should be linked with the Bologna Process to enforce the ambitious targets to be achieved by 2010, to increase permeability between all sectors of education and to make lifelong learning a reality within Europe.