



Italian Ministry for Education , University and Research

Directorate for University Autonomy and Students
Unit for International Relations

NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS JULY 2003

- **Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees**

The Italian University system seems to have reached broadly this objective, thanks to the reform of the HE system of 1999. The study courses have been restructured on different levels (first cycle, second cycle, doctorate) which allow the comparability at European level due to a few key issues:

- a clear description of the didactic offer, based on educational goals determined and defined with the contribution of the stakeholders;
- the adoption of a system of credits based on ECTS;
- the Ministerial Decree of May 2001 which provides for the implementation of the Diploma Supplement as compulsory, following a scheme consistent with the European model (the DS has to be issued also in a second European language);
- the ratification of the Lisbon Convention. The Prague Communiqué recommended all parties "to take full advantage of existing national legislation and European tools aimed at facilitating academic and professional recognition". To such an end Italy has ratified the Joint Convention of the Council of Europe and of Unesco-Europe Region signed in Lisbon in 1997, which concerns the academic recognition of higher education qualifications in the European Region. The above international Convention, generally referred to as "Lisbon Convention", is aimed at facilitating the reciprocal recognition of academic qualifications conferred by Higher Education Institutions of the Contracting Parties.

The Lisbon Convention makes provisions for the recognition of school leaving qualifications giving access to higher education, periods of study, higher education qualifications, qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons, and persons in a refugee-like situation.

The Italian Law 148 of 11 July 2002 is particularly important because it not only ratifies and gives execution to the Lisbon Convention but also introduces a few substantial changes and innovations into the Italian legislation as well as in the procedures of academic recognition. In such respect, its most relevant articles are illustrated here below.

Art. 2 - The task of the recognition of foreign qualifications:

- to grant access to higher education,
- to allow to pursue further studies at Italian Universities,
- to confer Italian University degrees,

is attributed to Italian Universities and Higher Education Institutions.

Art. 3 - On the one side, individual applications for academic recognition have to clearly refer to the Lisbon Convention, and to include a complete documentation; on the other,



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Universities and Higher Education Institutions have to express their evaluation within 90 (ninety) days running from the date on which the applications concerned were received.

Art. 4 - A ministerial decree will be issued, stating the regulations for the application of Art. VI.5 of the Convention (recognition of foreign qualifications awarded by foreign Higher Education Institutions operating in Italy).

Art. 5 - Execution regulations have to be approved with the purpose of solving those cases of academic recognition that do not fall within the scope of art. 2 above. In such cases the recognition responsibility will be entrusted with State Administrations that have to operate taking into due account the current provisions on recognition to professional ends and for access to the civil service. The related recognition procedures will be defined in the execution regulations themselves.

Art. 5 was intended to introduce the opportunity of "finalised academic recognition", based on the concept of comparability rather than equivalence.

Art. 9 - The previous legal provisions regulating the academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications are repealed.

- **Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles**

After the reform of 1999, foreseeing the two cycles system, the Italian Universities started introducing gradually the new system: for the academic year 2001-2002, the first cycle of three years was introduced, while the second cycle of two years has been introduced only for the academic year 2002-2003. Up to now, 3.200 degree courses of the first cycle and 2.100 degree courses of the second cycles have been set up.

The framework of the reform as been completed with a monitoring system able to identify problems and to plan future adjustments on the reform.

The reform was meant to meet the need for "comparable degrees" that both the Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communiqué had indicated as necessary "to promote simple, efficient and fair recognition". Therefore, it is important that good practices be concretely adopted by all parties in Europe so as to define fair levels of comparability among the respective degrees.

At the beginning of 2002, a database has been set up on the web site of the Ministry for Education, Higher Education and Research (hereinafter, "the Ministry"), illustrating all the teaching programmes offered by the Italian Universities ("Banca dati dell'offerta formativa").

- **Establishment of a system of credits**

The use of credits in Italy is based on the European Credit Transfer System. The University educational credits represent by now an essential element of the curricula. One University credit corresponds to 25 hours of work per student. The average yearly workload of a full-time student is conventionally fixed at 60 credits.

This important structural innovation of the University system caused great changes related also to the teaching methods: the modular structure of the degree courses enables the comparability of the results and the evaluation of the learning outcomes throughout more objective criteria.



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- **Promotion of mobility**

With the aim of fostering the international mobility of students, with the Law 170 of 11 July 2003 a “fund to support the mobility of students” has been established. The financial support of the Ministry will be distributed to the Universities and will include also supplementary funds for the Erasmus grants. With the same aim, this Law provides for the setting up of the National Register of Students and Graduates. The Register shall facilitate the procedures related to the recognition of credits.

In Italy a survey has been launched, very recently, on the participation of the Italian students to the mobility programmes. The results of this survey will be available very soon.

However, the need of making Erasmus more flexible, by adapting this programme to the new architecture of the two cycles, is considered a high priority by the Italian academic world.

Italian Universities complain also about a serious obstacle to the international mobility of students, represented by the lack of legislative adaptation for the recognition of joint degrees in the other European Countries. Italian Law 509 of 1999 allows Universities to award joint degrees with other Italian or foreign Universities.

- **Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance**

The only existing Body dealing with evaluation is the National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System (CNVSU), which is responsible for determining the general criteria for University evaluation, fostering experimentation along with the diffusion of evaluation methodologies, developing a yearly programme of University external evaluations. Another important task of the CNVSU is to define criteria and methodologies for the harmonisation of the self-evaluation procedures carried out by the individual Internal Evaluation Units of the Universities.

At the Minister’s request, the Committee also performs advisory tasks, preliminary inquiries, evaluations, and defines standards, parameters, technical regulations.

There is also a methodology for evaluating degree courses which can be adopted by Universities on a voluntary basis. This model belongs to the “CampusOne Project” launched by the Rectors Conference of the Italian Universities (CRUI) and it is based on both internal evaluation and external evaluation, with the aim of improving the teaching quality and to promote the quality culture among Higher Education Institutions.

This Project is financed by the Government which allocated 100 MEURO for the years 2002-2004. With the aim of promoting the innovation of the study courses, the programme is focussed on 5 points: Quality evaluation, ICT, Programme management evaluation, Languages and computers skills certification, Links to stakeholders.

Moreover, CRUI and CNVSU are studying together a system of evaluation and accreditation to launch at national level.



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- **Promotion of the European dimensions in higher education**

There is a general agreement on the fact that one of the fundamental elements, in order to reach the European dimension, is the implementation of Joint Programmes, preferably leading to Joint Degrees. Joint Programmes give a great added value to higher education with reference to the University mission to form the human capital and the European citizens.

The Italian academic world counted, during the last two years, a large quantity of important and successful experiences in this field, arising both from individual HE Institutions or from initiatives at national level, such as the French-Italian University, the German-Italian University and the Virtual University UNIADRION (among the seven Countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative).

In order to stimulate a real integration of the international and intercultural dimension as part of the usual teaching, learning and research activities, promotion and support of internationalisation process as well as promotion of research doctorate programmes with international features and co-financing of EU projects have been included among the priorities for the period 2001-2003.

The Ministry co-finances integrated study programmes carried out with the participation of teachers and students of at least another country, in which the mutual recognition of study periods and titles is assured, and/or joint diplomas are delivered.

Thanks to this Programme, several joint programmes with European and extra European Universities were launched. The call for proposals envisaged three types of projects that could be co-financed by the Ministry:

- joint design and organisation, on a reciprocal basis, of University programmes (first degree, second degree, doctorate, master, specialisation courses), subject to the signing of agreements for such purposes which envisage the participation of teachers and students from Institutions of at least one other Country;
- transnational educational initiatives, in collaboration with Universities of other Countries, aimed at the setting up in such Countries of courses or teaching structures apt to value and promote Italian University education models abroad;
- inter-university cooperation initiatives for the study -comparative at international level and of a verification/prospective nature at national level- of themes connected to the process of the harmonisation of European University systems referred to in the Bologna Declaration (accreditation, credits, diploma supplement, assessment, quality, recognition of qualifications, etc.). Such initiatives must be aimed at improving the quality, from an international perspective, of University organisation and related administrative structures, must produce effects on the University system and must detail the means by which the results achieved will be disseminated.

Moreover, an important initiative has to be mentioned: in 2003 the Italian NARIC, thanks to the financial support to the European Commission, has set up a national database on joint and double degrees.



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Finally, the Ministry has defined (Ministerial Decree of 17 April 2003) criteria and methodologies for the setting up of “Virtual Universities”, that will be the basis for transnational virtual campuses.

- **Lifelong learning**

In Italy, Universities are not significantly involved in programmes of lifelong learning, which pertain, so far, to the secondary education. However, it is currently under way a strong implementation of e-learning programmes at higher education level, because e-learning is considered as one of the fundamental components of lifelong learning. The Ministerial Decree of 17 April 2003 describes the criteria and procedures for accreditation of degree courses through e-learning, specifying that e-learning can be a helpful tool for the continuous vocational retraining of adults.

Moreover, The National Register of Students and Graduates (see above) will be a tool for monitoring the periods of vocational training and work stages of students and for assuring the recognition of these periods as credits for the curricula.

- **Higher education institutions and students**

The social dimension is considered by the Ministry a fundamental theme and a starting point for the development of the best relations with all the stakeholders and in particular with the students. Students are to be deeply involved and their expectations in respect to the services (educational and non educational) offered by Universities are to be clearly defined and expressed, in order to make University able to pursue its mission in a efficient and effective way. The consultation with students has to be integrated with a continuous dialogue with all the stakeholders, in order to proceed to a restructuring of curricula that can make degrees relevant to the labour market.

In fact, thanks to the reform of 1999 (Law 509), bilateral University Commissions have been set up, in which teachers and students, represented in equal number, evaluate together the consistency between the credits assigned to the educational activities and the specific planned educational goals and express opinions on the Degree Course Regulations. This law therefore states the active involvement of students in the decision-making process concerning the implementation of the Higher Education system reform.

The Law 509/99 also prescribes that Universities proceed in strict coordination and consultation with the local stakeholders in the designing of the new curricula, with particular regard to the first cycle, in order to favour and to foster employability. That because the curricula have to be consistent not only with the educational goals, but also with the needs of the labour market in terms of skills and competencies.

Moreover, there are several initiatives of the Italian Universities aiming at monitoring and facilitating the employability of students. One of them is “Alma Laurea”, a project of a Consortium of 31 Italian Universities which is co-financed by the Ministry. This project publishes on Internet the curricula of the graduates, allowing a dialogue in real time among graduates, Universities and employers.