

## **The European Higher Education Area - Achieving the Goals**

07.04.05 Draft Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education  
Bergen, 19-20 May 2005

1. We, Ministers responsible for higher education in the participating countries of the Bologna Process, have met for a mid-term review and for setting goals and priorities towards 2010. At this conference, we have welcomed Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as new participating countries in the Bologna Process.

### **I. The Cooperation: Participating countries and partners**

2. We confirm our commitment to coordinating our policies through the Bologna Process to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. We all share the common understanding of the principles, objectives and commitments of the Process as expressed in the Bologna Declaration and in the subsequent communiqués from the Ministerial Conferences in Prague and Berlin.

3. We underline the central role of higher education institutions, their staff and students as partners in the Bologna Process. Their role in the implementation of the Process becomes all the more important now that the necessary legislative reforms are largely in place and we encourage them to continue and intensify their efforts to establish the EHEA. We welcome the clear commitment of higher education institutions across Europe to the Process and we recognise that time is needed to optimise the impact of structural change on curricula and thus to ensure the introduction of the innovative teaching and learning processes that Europe needs.

4. We welcome the support of other organisations, including business and the social partners and we look forward to their continued cooperation in reaching the goals of the Bologna Process.

### **II. Taking stock**

4bis. We take note of the significant progress made towards our goals, as set out in the General Report 2003-2005 from the Follow-up Group and in the EUA's Trends IV report.

5. At our meeting in Berlin, we asked the Follow-up Group for a mid-term stocktaking, focusing on three priorities – the degree system, quality assurance and the recognition of degrees and periods of studies. While good progress has been made in these three priority areas, it will be important to ensure that it is consistent across all participating countries. We therefore see a need for greater sharing of expertise to build capacity at both institutional and governmental level.

#### **The degree system**

6. We note with satisfaction that the two-cycle degree system is being implemented on a large scale, with more than half of the students being enrolled in it in most countries. In spite of some remaining procedural problems, there are no major obstacles to access between cycles. There is a need however for greater dialogue, involving Governments, institutions and employers, to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications.

7. We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including the possibility of a separate qualification within or linked to the first cycle), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. We commit ourselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA for 2010, and to have started work on this by 2007. We ask the Follow-up Group to report on the implementation and further development of the overarching framework.

8. We underline the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA to the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing general education as well as vocational education and training as now being developed within the European Union. We ask the European Commission fully to involve all parties to the Bologna Process in their work.

### **Quality assurance**

9. Almost all countries have made provision for a quality assurance system based on the criteria set out in the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking. However, there is still progress to be made when it comes to student involvement. Furthermore, we urge higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance.

10. We adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA. We commit ourselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis and will report to the next Ministerial Conference. We welcome the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies. We ask that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB with a report back to us through the BFUG. We underline the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.

### **Recognition of degrees and study periods**

11. We note that 36 of the 45 participating countries have now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We urge those that have not already done so to ratify the Convention without delay. We call on all participating countries to ensure the full implementation of its principles and to address persistent recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country's national report for the next Ministerial Conference. We express support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and call upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to recognise joint degrees awarded by two or more countries in the EHEA.

12. We urge participating countries and all higher education institutions to recognise prior learning or relevant qualifications from non-formal learning as giving access to and as elements in higher education programmes. We see the development of national and European frameworks for qualifications as an opportunity to further embed lifelong learning in higher education.

### **III. Further challenges**

#### **Higher education and research**

14. We underline the importance of higher education in further enhancing research for the economic and cultural development of our societies and for social cohesion. We note that the efforts to introduce structural change and improve the quality of teaching should go hand in hand with the effort to improve the quality of research. We therefore emphasise the importance of research and research training in maintaining and improving the quality and enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of the EHEA. With a view to achieving critical mass we recognise the need to improve the synergy between the higher education sector and other research sectors throughout our respective countries and between the EHEA and the European Research Area.

15. To achieve these objectives, doctoral level qualifications need to be fully aligned with the EHEA overarching framework for qualifications using the outcomes-based approach. Considering the need for organised doctoral programmes and the need for transparent supervision and assessment, we note that the normal workload of the third cycle in most countries would correspond to 3-4 years full time. We urge universities to ensure that their doctoral programmes promote innovative structures to meet the challenge of interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills, thus meeting the needs of the wider employment market. We need to achieve an overall increase in the numbers of doctoral students across the EHEA. We see participants in third cycle programmes both as students and as early stage researchers.

#### **Mobility**

16. We recognise that mobility of students and staff among all participating countries remains one of the key objectives of the Bologna Process. Aware of the many remaining challenges to be overcome, we reconfirm our commitment to facilitate the portability of grants and loans where appropriate through joint action. We shall intensify our efforts to lift obstacles for mobility by facilitating the delivery of visa and work permits and by encouraging participation in mobility programmes. We see the need for more reliable data for monitoring the progress and call for collaboration on improving the statistics. We urge institutions and students to make full use of existing mobility programmes, advocating full recognition of study periods abroad within such programmes.

#### **The attractiveness of EHEA and cooperation with the rest of the world**

17. The European Higher Education Area should be open and attractive to the rest of the world. Our contribution to achieving education for all should be based on the principle of sustainable development and be in accordance with the ongoing international work on developing guidelines for quality provision of cross-border higher education. We reiterate that in international academic cooperation, academic values should prevail.

18. We want the European Higher Education Area to be a partner to higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions. We underline the importance of mutual understanding and respect. We look forward to enhancing the understanding of the Bologna Process in other continents by sharing our experiences with reform processes in neighbouring regions. We stress the need for dialogue on issues of mutual interest.

## **IV. Taking stock on progress for 2007**

19. We charge the Follow-up Group with continuing and widening the stocktaking process and to report in time for the next Ministerial Conference. We expect stocktaking to take place in the domains of the degree system, quality assurance and recognition of degrees and study periods. Within these three categories, we shall also look for progress in the implementation of the national frameworks for qualifications, in recognition of non-formal learning paths as well as of joint degrees and in the transparency of the third cycle. Therefore by 2007 each participating country should have completed the implementation of the three intermediate priorities as formulated in Berlin for the 2005 stocktaking.

Moreover, each country should have:

- put in place legislation, where needed, for the awarding of joint degrees, including at the doctorate level
- established opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning,
- made progress in the organisation of the third cycle.

We also charge the Follow-up Group with establishing comparable data on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries and to report in time for the next Ministerial Conference.

## **V. Preparing for 2010**

20. Building on the achievements so far in the Bologna Process, we wish to establish a European Higher Education Area based on the principles of quality and transparency. We must cherish our rich heritage and cultural diversity while at the same time contributing to a knowledge-based society. We commit to upholding the principle of public responsibility for higher education while recognising the need for it to adapt to complex modern societies. As higher education is situated at the crossroads of research, education and innovation, it is also the key to Europe's competitiveness.

The EHEA is structured around three cycles, where each level has the function of preparing the student for the labour market, for further competence building and for active citizenship. The overarching framework for qualifications, the agreed set of standards and guidelines for national quality assurance arrangements, and the recognition of degrees and periods of study are also key characteristics of the structure of the EHEA.

21. In view of the social dimension of the Bologna Process we renew our commitment to making higher education equally accessible to all and stress the need for appropriate conditions for the students, so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background.

22. We endorse the follow-up structure set up in Berlin (*with the possible inclusion of XX in the Follow-up Group*). As the Bologna Process leads to the establishment of the EHEA, we have to consider the appropriate arrangements needed to support the continuing development beyond 2010 and we ask the Follow-up Group to explore these issues.

23. We will hold the next Ministerial Conference in London in 2007.