

Report of the International Seminar on the 2nd Bologna Cycle

Zagreb, Croatia

12 April 2013

The Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and the University of Zagreb within the framework of Irish and Croatian co-chairmanship of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) organised the International Seminar on the 2nd Bologna Cycle. The Seminar hosted about 80 participants.

The purpose of the Seminar was to examine the feasibility of **having common principles for Master programmes in the EHEA** with the objective of making second cycle degrees more readable and comparable between European countries education according to the commitment of the Ministers laid down in the Bucharest Communiqué that *"...high quality second cycle programs are a necessary precondition for the success of linking teaching, learning and research"*.

The Seminar was divided into 3 thematic sessions and addressed issues related to coherence and transparency of the second cycle qualifications, possibilities of progression between university-based and professional programmes in the context of binary systems with the emphasis on the establishment and implementation of national qualifications frameworks as a possible solution to questions of recognition.

FIRST THEMATIC SESSION: Introduction to policy debate on second cycle qualifications

The first thematic session hosted 3 speakers, namely:

- Prof. Ružica Beljo Lučić, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports
"Introduction to policy debate on second cycle qualifications"
- Jonna Korhonen, European University Association (EUA)
"Main developments and trends in Europe: Survey of Master Degrees in Europe"
- Prof. Blaženka Divjak, Vice-rector, University of Zagreb, Republic of Croatia
"University second cycle qualifications: lessons learned and future challenges"

The first presentation stressed the importance of that EHEA reforms that have changed the landscape of higher education across Europe and highlighted that they should be further implemented according to the set of goals outlined by the Bucharest Communiqué. Though, national structures have become more compatible and comparable than before at the same time the 2012 Bologna Process Implementation Report shows that additional efforts are needed for the establishment of the coherence between national policies in recognition, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and transparency. The presentation also introduced the higher education scheme in Croatia, Croatian Qualifications Framework as well as called for an integrated policy development based on coherent structural reforms in higher education.

The second presentation introduced a brief profile of EUA as well as provided an overview of the recent developments concerning the second cycle qualifications based on the EUA's Survey on Master Degrees in Europe (2009) and Trends 2010 study. The presentation highlighted that Master Degrees are still young in many countries and national legislation, pace and way of

implementation varies among the countries. As a conclusion the presentation suggested to improve the transparency and permeability through learning outcomes, consolidate NQFs and have clarity of designation in the second cycle as well as improve readability based on Master 'markers' and recognition procedures.

The third presentation showed the challenges of the second cycle, in particular stressing that learning outcomes of the university second cycle programmes should fulfill employability requirements and provide basic research skills. It also presented a variety of challenges for higher education institutions, employers, students as well as policy makers. The presentation also included a SWOT analysis on the second cycle in Croatia from the university perspective.

After the first thematic session, the following concerns were raised:

- In most EHEA country the job market is more favorable to those who have Master Degrees that is why the number of students who want to get Master Degrees immediately after Bachelor is rather high.
- There is an uneven implementation of the Bologna tools in the Croatian universities and it varies from department to department.
- Very often professors do not consider that after the first cycle the students are ready for the job market.
- Mostly the introduction of the two cycle system has been done automatically and now it is necessary to look into the content of the structural changes.
- Master Degrees are very diverse across the EHEA and learning outcomes should be a channel between Bachelor Degree and Master Degree.

SECOND THEMATIC SESSION: Entry mechanisms to the second cycle and progression routes to the third cycle Bologna qualifications

The second thematic session started by introducing the message sent from the UK colleagues from their paper on Master Degrees, which said that second cycle qualifications should be recognised on their own merit and recognition should not automatically be denied because the holder does not have a Bachelor degree or has one in a different subject from the second cycle qualifications. According to the UK Quality Assurance Agency refusal on these grounds undermines the notion of lifelong learning and denies the contribution that learning from employment or other sources can make an influence on the university decisions to admit students to a Master's Degree without formal undergraduate qualifications.

Three speakers of the second thematic session were:

- Prof. G. Honor Fagan, Dean of Graduate Studies, National University of Ireland Maynooth
"Entry mechanisms to the second cycle and progression routes to the third cycle Bologna qualifications"
- Prof. Mladen Mauher and prof. Miroslav Slamić, National Council of Polytechnics, Republic of Croatia
"Professionally - oriented second cycle qualifications"

The first presentation gave an outline of the second cycle programmes in Ireland as well as their purpose and learning outcomes. The presentation also introduced the qualifications necessary for acquiring two types of Master Degrees (Taught and Research) and Doctoral Degree in Ireland. Irish National Qualifications Framework was also presented and it described the absence of a binary system in provision at Level 9 (Master Degree), since there are no separate vocational, professional and academic categories.

The second presentation introduced the demand and supply side of the professional qualifications and its interaction model. It also showed the diploma degrees and diploma

supplements at the Polytechnics of Zagreb as well as enabling models and technologies, mutual mentoring approaches, national classifications of qualifications.

THIRD THEMATIC SESSION: Academic recognition

The third thematic session hosted 2 speakers, namely:

- Ivana Krznar, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports
"Obstacles and challenges for the automatic academic recognition: analysis of the experience from the HEIs in Croatia"
- Dr. Stojan Sorčan, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, Republic of Slovenia
"Second cycle qualifications in the region: Finding path"

The purpose of **the first presentation** was to show that quality assurance is a key mechanism for credibility of national and foreign qualifications and quality demands should be equal both for national and for foreign qualifications. It was stressed that national qualifications are under scrutiny by constant demand, while quality of foreign qualifications remain mainly on mutual trust. EQAR was outlined as far most reliable mechanism for enhancing confidence in quality of qualifications.

The second presentation outlined the challenges of recognition of academic qualifications as laid down in the Bucharest Communiqué and the Statement of the Third Bologna Policy Forum. It also introduced key points and scope of work of the Bologna Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition and proposal for a Western Balkan cooperation initiative on automatic recognition. The presentation highlighted that automatic recognition is an important policy tool for achieving Europe 2020 goals and reinforcing the EHEA. It also recommended that without commitment to and implementation of EU 2020 and the EHEA policies at national level these cannot become an effective reality.

Comments made after the third thematic session were:

- In order to have fair recognition, it is important to have a reliable quality assurance system.
- The issue of recognition is first of all based on trust and it also tackles the three points of the European Commission policy, which are qualifications frameworks, mobility and quality assurance.
- It is important to understand the definition of "automatic" related to the recognition.
- EQAR can be a useful tool to support automatic recognition of quality assurance decisions.
- Quality Assurance system should not be confused with the quality culture at the institution.

The organisers thanked the speakers and participants with aspiration that this seminar was only the first attempt to boost discussions across Europe on the issue of the second Bologna cycle qualifications, hoping that these discussions might lead to establishing of common principles for the second Bologna cycle qualifications, with the view of improving mutual understanding between European HE systems.