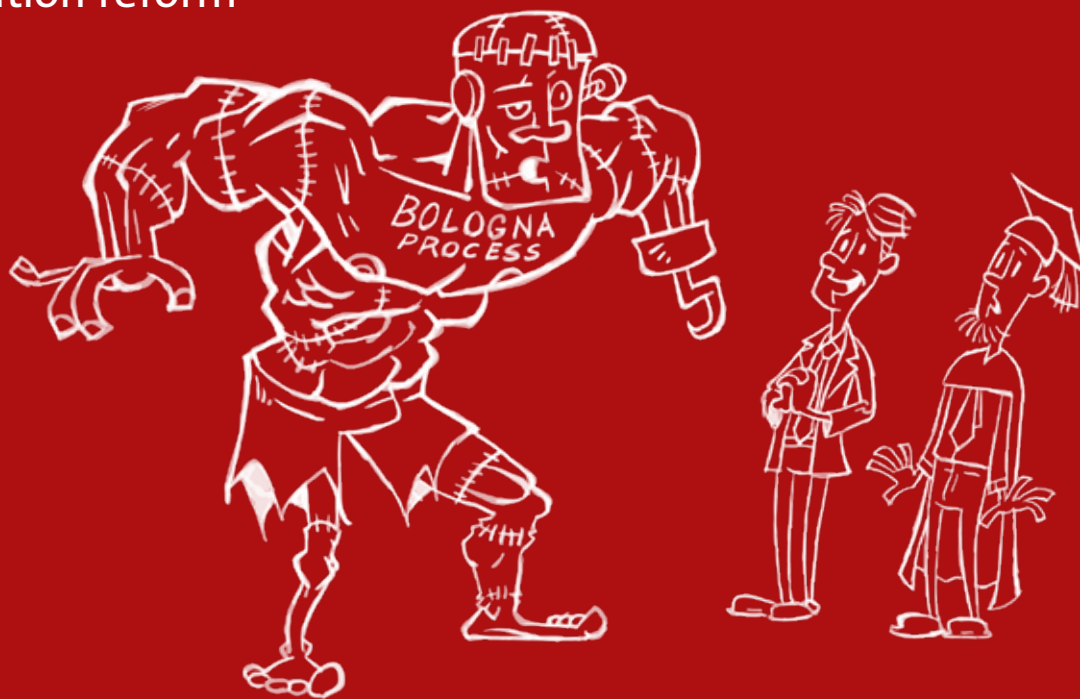# BOLOGNA AT THE FINISH LINE

An account of ten years of European higher education reform

BOLOGNA
AT THE FINISH LINE

AN ACCOUNT OF TEN YEARS OF EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM

The European Students' Union

IMPRINT

BOLOGNA AT THE FINISH LINE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

You can find an electronic version of this publication on the web site *www.esu-online.org*. Here you can also download ESU's *Bologna With Student Eyes* reports from 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009, as well as other publications about higher education.

1   OPENING WORDS

The *Bologna at the Finish Line* publication could be seen as somewhat of a paradox. It is in fact an anniversary publication, but rather than celebrating ten years of the Bologna Process, it instead points out the remaining work to be done for the fulfillment of the comprehensive package of Bologna action lines underpinning the process' major goals. It also talks about a ›finish line‹, when in fact the real finish line has been pushed back by at least ten years. And yet, the title seemed to be the most appropriate, because in fact all the Bologna reforms were thought to be possible within a ten year timeframe and it is now, during the 2010 Vienna and Budapest Anniversary Ministerial Conference, that European Education Ministers will launch the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

There are various developments within the overall European transformation reform that are beneficial both for the academic communities and for European societies. If we detached ourselves and looked at the macro transformation, we would find that the facade of European higher education has improved considerably. But there are also a lot of downsides that became apparent only in the course of implementation of the Bologna action lines. What is most interesting is, that in order to keep the momentum to implement ›basic‹ action lines: social dimension, quality assurance, recognition etc., most decision-makers felt the need to have ›new‹ action lines in order to satisfy the public's need for apparent progress in the higher education arena. This public pressure for progress and the subsequent response of many Governments has been seen by many as giving quick answers to pressing problems and is perhaps the most worrying tendency that ESU sees, as we look to the future of the process. Throw this into the mix of national reforms that have nothing to do with Bologna and the true Bologna action lines, and we get a glimpse of why Bologna is at the same time respected, blamed, loved and hated by academic communities and governments alike.

ESU warned early on, that a ›pick and choose‹ implementation approach, when it came to the Bologna action lines would lead to great imbalances in the national higher education systems. This is especially true if the Bologna agenda is also used for justifying national political changes, with little connection to the core Bologna aims. The anniversary of the Bologna Process in Budapest and Vienna, will most probably be marked by various protests targeting the limited, purely formal or even wrong implementation of the action lines on the ground. Incomplete implementation has triggered negative effects: inflexibility of the curricula, increases in study costs, lack of recognition, greater challenges for mobility; all of which are legitimate reasons for students not to support the nationally rebranded Bologna reforms. A policy process which proves to be to the detriment of at least ninety-percent of the academic community can

hardly be continued without a sound debate on how to mitigate the negative effects of past implementation mistakes. Only through communicating over what Bologna is really about, in principle and action, whilst not trying to use the Process as a legitimising agent for other reforms (that sometimes contradict the very core of the agenda) can we make sure that the next ten years will consolidate the European Higher Education Area.

The turning point of the Bologna Process is the move away from formal implementation towards in-depth mindset changes and re-assessment of the already implemented elements. This involves the full, active participation of the entire academic community, with perhaps a societal debate on the impacts of the Bologna Process in order to raise awareness to its potential and to its benefits, but also to the responsibilities and risks that come with deepening this unprecedented voluntary European-wide agenda.

For this anniversary the *Bologna at the Finish Line* publication draws on the previous four editions of *Bologna With Student Eyes* and attempts to provide a temporally extended reflection on the grassroots perception of the Bologna Process, through the eyes of the most supportive, but also the most critical member of the academic community—the European student.

I wish to warmly thank the *Bologna at the Finish Line* authors' team—Allan, Christian, Daniela, Emma, Kristine, Inge, Melinda, Petri, Sölvi and especially Robert for the overall successful coordination and Andrea for her continuous support. Also, Linus and Olav provided a priceless set of finishing touches for this publication to be a pleasure for the eye of the reader. A number of Bologna experts agreed to provide us with their perceptions on the evolution and future development of the process and for that I wish to thank them deeply. And finally, but certainly not least I would warmly thank our research reviewers team, Pavel Zgaga, Dionyssis Kladis and Per Nyborg for their rich input, support and patience. Your work will hopefully pave the way for a more student-centred Bologna Process by 2020.

We also thank our member unions for all of their work with filling in the questionnaires, providing the information which enabled us to see the true picture and for their continuous feedback on the quality of our publications. You were the reason this publication saw the light of day and we will continue to be the loudspeaker to your voice within the Bologna policy arena for the next decade as well.

Welcome to our past ten year reality and to our future decade vision!

Ligia Deca
ESU Chairperson

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Finish Line might indicate an end, but sometimes, there is more than one finish line. The Bologna Process, set into motion in 1999, aimed to construct a common European Higher Education Area by the year 2010. However, only now it appears that the actual finish line is nowhere to be found. With four editions of the *Bologna With Student Eyes* publication, ESU (previously known as ESIB) sought to measure actual developments from one Bologna Ministerial Conference to the next. ESU tried to define the required standards on what should constitute a truly European higher education landscape. In addition, the students of Europe also expressed their perspective on the Lisbon Strategy in two different handbooks and published a Bologna Black Book. The main conclusions in *Bologna at the Finish Line* are drawn on the basis of this commitment by students as the most credible stakeholders, to supervise the process becoming a reality. Furthermore, the opinions of experts and the views of national students' unions, as well as official Bologna Process Ministerial commitments and key reports—both official and the stakeholder reports—have all been considered in this exercise.

Ten years might not be enough time to make final conclusions, especially if the final design of the Bologna Process is ever-changing. But we can say with certainty that the ambition of a common European Higher Education Area has not been matched by equal ambition in making it a reality. Not nearly enough effort has been invested. The consistently referenced *Bologna With Student Eyes* conclusions of an ›à la carte‹ method of picking which reforms suit countries and in which particular flavour, has left a bittersweet taste for those still daring to dream of the joint intentions of the Bologna Process becoming true. In this regard, the entire reform agenda has become one of diplomatic dances and gestures. Sometimes one might get the feeling that the time spent on negotiations which connect the Ministerial Conferences has been disproportional to true action, leading countries only to forgo previous commitments due to the Process being redrafted again and again.

Yet, we would not be assuming the worst if the Bologna Process was dismissed as something alike to the effect of a supernova explosion in the known universe—a powerful disruption of the status quo, but yet so microscopic in the bigger picture. In fact, the change within the European higher education arena has been drastic. *Bologna at the Finish Line* underlines the importance of the Bologna Process in this. For ESU, the question is just how positive the overall changes have been for students within different higher education systems.

Still, the process, however disorganised it might appear, is often misunderstood. Confusion is one if the keywords are understood in diverse ways, which can be easily noticed with almost all Bologna action lines in this publication. Misunderstandings happen even in the midst of careful diplomacy, but unfortunately these have a highly negative effect. They are either caused by different interpretations

or other processes like the EU Lisbon Strategy, which also influences higher education. As examples, it can be seen that after many years, one can still bear witness to the social dimension of higher education being neglected—issues of access and equality, financial support measures seem to be rather decreasing in popularity amongst governments. Some action lines have also been redesigned, with a sentiment of national superiority like recognition and qualification systems. Furthermore, it can be noticed that the Bologna Process follows a trend of gravitating towards the ideals of corporate management and competition. These ideals stem mostly from the Lisbon Strategy, which was launched about the same time as the Bologna Process, limiting the involvement of academic communities in the governance of higher education institutions. This comes as a new development against previous years of good progress in true student participation, for which the Bologna Process has been supportive of. However, sometimes, we are also hit by an approach unmatched in its blatancy, in which the governments tick boxes and claim to be finished. This is their attempt to be excellent pupils and often they adopt legislation without a follow-up, just to be reported as green (which is the most desirable outcome) in the traffic light schemes of the official Bologna reports. These issues have all been raised over and over again and this is where, in the true value of stakeholder reports, we have seen light shed on the shortcomings.

In spite of this, the crystal ball does not only tell the story of pessimists. There is still ambition, which we can witness with the setting of a new type of measureable goals, such has happened for mobility even though the skies remain dim over that playing field. There is clear progress in more European cooperation in quality assurance. On a dim, but positive note, the three-cycles are mostly in place and Europe is moving towards the use of a common system for recognising studies, within the frame of the ECTS credit system. Lastly, we can witness calls for education systems becoming more student-centred.

A roadmap, with several finishing lines appears in this maze, as new definitions are added and more actions foreseen from one Ministerial Conference to another. Most crucially, the conclusions of *Bologna at the Finish Line* remind us of the complexity of modern Europe and why it is difficult to carry through a common agenda. Our work in European integration is far from done. We seek to bridge the gap and ensure that higher education remains in the core of the caring and safe, but also progressive societies we claim to be members of. *Bologna at the Finish Line* underlines the following conclusions and recommendations that need to be taken seriously because as ever as it seems the Bologna Process might indeed be wearing out its friends.

1   In order for **mobility** to achieve its full mission—academic and cultural meaningfulness, networking, tolerance and global active citizenship building, experiencing new modes of learning and contributing to the quality enhancement of the academic environment—support must be given in a targeted manner to all types of mobility.

2   There is a lack of overall financial support for covering the entire EHEA mobility scope. Unfortunately, no Bologna level financial support system for mobility has been agreed, which makes the adoption EHEA level ›twenty percent mobile by 2020‹ benchmark for mobility a shallow undertaking for increasing mobility levels.

3   In the current global context, mobility is also increasingly seen as a potential market and thus an extra funding source for higher education institutions, rather than a means of fostering academic quality enhancement and personal development.

4   On the policy level, there seems to be confusion between the goals of the EU Lisbon Strategy, the opening up of the EU/EEA labour market for highly qualified candidates and the overarching purposes of mobility in the EHEA. The aim of balancing mobility and using it as a building block for the EHEA is seriously being jeopardised by this tendency and brain-drain is definitely an issue concerning many Bologna member states.

5   On a more grassroots level, the institutional commitment to mobility is unequal and disproportionately focused on incoming rather than outgoing students (with notable exceptions). Higher education institutions should rethink their internal rules if mobility is to be a part of institutional strategies.

6   Lack of recognition remains a major deterrent to going abroad, for those aiming at academically meaningful mobility. Respecting learning agreements, proper implementation of ECTS and the diploma supplement and respecting the Lisbon Recognition convention are just a few of the measures which need to be taken, in order to remove this significant obstacle for mobility.

7   There has been widespread reform and implementation within the three-cycle and credit systems. The **three-cycle system and the ECTS** are among the prime examples of successes of the Bologna Process, in a global context.

8   However, the degree system is often not flexible enough to increase mobility or to support the employability of students. In addition, the third cycle has not been sufficiently defined and the status of third cycle candidates varies across Europe, leaving those students to unequal conditions within Europe.

9   When it comes to ECTS, several national students' unions and other stakeholders (most notably EUA) note that important elements of this topic have only been superficially implemented, especially on an institutional level. This is especially a concern when it comes to linking ECTS to measuring meaningful workload and linking the accumulation of credits to learning outcomes—the latter being essential to move towards true student-centred learning.

10 The legal status of the doctoral candidates varies from being regarded as students in some countries to being regarded as early-stage researchers in others. There is thus no single unified

legal definition of this group, and this causes some difficulties in creating a unified policy on the third cycle. In many countries there are also many part-time doctoral candidates and the difference between these candidates and the full-time candidates is also a vulnerable question.

11 Several countries have kept their old degree system, in addition to introducing the three-cycle system. This has led to confusion, but also to a superficial level of implementation. Degree structure reforms are not matched with curricula reforms and teaching, and there are thus substantial elements of the Bologna process that have not been implemented.

12 The first two cycles have been widely implemented, but there are still challenges concerning the admission to the second cycle for students, even within their own field of study. Furthermore ESU emphasises the importance of high quality supervision and assessment, as well as adequate funding and the promotion of mobility.

13 Since the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 1997, there has been great progress in terms of the recognition of qualifications and studies, but problems persist, even thirteen years after the signing of the convention. Besides hindering mobility, when it comes to the recognition of prior learning, much effort needs to be made in order to get the higher education systems of Europe to accept that they do not have a monopoly on learning and on gaining qualifications.

14 There needs to be a clear understanding of the fact that, without proper recognition procedures for all types of learning, the mainstream goals of the Bologna process or common European goals of increasing mobility, inter-institutional cooperation and increasing access to education are going to be difficult to reach.

15 For the past decade, there has been increasing European cooperation in the field of quality assurance in higher education. The European cooperation began before 1999 and has been further fostered throughout the implementation of the Bologna Process. The main achievements of the Bologna Process are the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, adopted at the ministerial conference in Bergen 2005 and the establishment of the European Quality Assurance Register, which started operating in 2008. Today, a revision of the European Standards and Guidelines has been put on the agenda by several stakeholders.

16 True and genuine student participation should be an integral part of quality assurance. Through participation in quality assurance processes, students can assess the quality of their courses and their teachers—elements that constitute the quality of education. However, this requires coherent internal quality assurance systems at higher education institutions, that take all aspects of education into account—in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines. The national students' unions with in Europe, have reported through the *Bologna*

With Student Eyes publications, that there is still wide room for improvement in student participation in quality assurance, at all levels of higher education.

17 When it comes to **student participation in higher education governance**, all the countries taking part in the Bologna Process allow for students to organise some form of representation. However, this is as far as the similarities between countries go. In some countries, students are active partners in all decision-making processes. In others, students only have nominal representation at a minimal number of institutional levels.

18 Whilst all ministerial communiqués since Prague, with the exception of the one adopted in London, have mentioned the importance of student participation, little has been done to make it a reality. Whilst participation has increased in some EHEA countries, the process has not had a great impact on student representation overall. This is partly because, whilst student participation has been considered a principle of the Bologna Process, it has never been recognised as an action line or included in stocktaking exercises.

19 Today, student participation is increasingly under threat by a general trend toward more effective and corporate management styles, which is likely to lead to decreasing democracy within higher education institutions. Even though a lot has been said, very little has truly been done to ensure active student participation at all levels throughout Europe.

20 **Qualification frameworks** made their way into the educational systems of Europe as early as the 1990s, but their inclusion into the Bologna process was a big step towards increased transparency and comparability of European higher education qualifications.

21 After an overarching framework for the future EHEA was set up as early as 2005, the creation of national qualification frameworks has been rather problematic. So far, only seven have been fully set up and self-certified.

22 The creation of national qualification frameworks has been slowed down by a great deal of confusion, both with previously existing higher education systems and between the notion of qualification frameworks for all life-long learning and those for higher education. In countries particularly resistant to ideas such as learning outcome-focused education and those without a previous culture of defining qualifications, delays might push the creation of functioning national qualification frameworks beyond 2012. In addition, we have seen national frameworks being adopted without true stakeholder involvement and this must be overcome.

23 There are numerous indications of EHEA not existing for the public view, with the increased outcry against the Bologna Process on a grassroots level being only one example. In this regard, the level and consistency of information about higher education must be fostered. Stakeholders and students' unions agree that for higher **transparency**, the already existing and agreed tools like recognition, quality assurance, ECTS and qualification frameworks should be used

and fully implemented, rather than heading for a crash course, with tools focusing on measuring institutional performance (such as rankings and classifications).

24 The aim of transparency should be to provide students, institutions and governments with unbiased information and fair and equal recognition of education throughout Europe. These tools need to consider the needs of the user and not be predefined packages in order to be truly useful. There needs to be a diversity of information provision about learning and research opportunities and the quality of these, and the students' unions, institutions, governments and European associations need to take urgent steps to provide this information.

25 Although it is difficult to streamline towards one definition of **life-long learning**, it is dangerously being seen as a tool for economy, rather than a way of empowering learners and citizens throughout their life. In this view, real commitment from ministers is needed for the creation of national policies on life-long learning that can aggressively deal with the current shortcomings. This is namely the elitist nature of lifelong learning on a number of levels; such as the cost of recognition of prior learning, the flexibility of such learning and high tuition costs.

26 The **Social dimension** is highly important, as too many capable students are still excluded from the higher education system, due to their background, insufficient student support systems or other barriers. It was therefore a great achievement for ESU, in Prague 2001, when the ministers agreed upon the students' suggestions to include the social dimension as an integral part of the Bologna Process. However, although there have been promises made, and although the importance of the Social Dimension has been stated in several communiqués since in Prague, little has actually happened,

27 One of the reasons motivating the poor implementation of the Social Dimension was the lack of data and comparable statistics. As this issue has already been addressed by international research initiated by prominent European organisations, it is expected it will be rightfully acted upon and should not be a further deterrent to taking action. The European Higher Education Area can be true only with a fully functional social dimension and with higher education being based on a principle of non-discrimination and equal access and completion of studies.

28 **Employability** is often of high concern to students and governments as a safeguard not only for the labour market, but as a part of personal capacity to learn and be adaptable within society. Yet, employability has not been fully enhanced by the setting up of the three-cycle system. Indeed, the growing number of bachelor graduates in an unstable economic environment, there is an immediate need to identify the common causes of graduate unemployment across the EHEA both in the short and long perspective.

29 Employability needs to be fully tackled in curricula development, with full stakeholder involvement, by combining studies with work placements or traineeships, providing sufficient

support services for seeking employment. More emphasis on graduate tracking should also be allowed to better understand and measure employability. Furthermore, proper recognition and understandable qualification frameworks are needed.

30 The concept of **student-centred learning** is still not uniformly defined, and various people or institutions have diverging definitions. For some it is limited to a pedagogical approach to education, whilst for others it is essentially an improved form of student participation in curricular and educational decision-making. Yet this has become one of the priorities for EHEA.

31 Many institutions have started gradually introducing changes that give students greater control over their educational path. However, the progress that is needed for authentic learner-centred education to take hold in Europe is vast and implies a shift not only in the learning paradigm, but also in mentality and in practice, that have been formed for decades or even centuries.

32 At the international level, there has been increasing debate over the **financing of higher education**. However, within the Bologna Process the area has always been cited, but never given much weight, or concrete action lines. It was only in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009 that the ministers acknowledged the need for public investment in higher education and placed funding as a priority for the next decade.

33 For students, the funding of higher education has been an ongoing concern, one which has been worsened by the ongoing economic crisis. Across the EHEA, tuition fees are being introduced, with students now paying for their education at the point of use. Further, where tuition fees already existed, the fees are increasing. Making matters worse are the ever-louder calls to close the higher education funding gap, by instituting ›marketisation‹ measures.

34 In order to remain sustainable and in order to guarantee the accessibility of our higher education systems—with the fulfilment of the multiple roles higher education has in society, as a public good and public responsibility—adequate financial resources should be made available and public funds must stay the prevalent source of financing of higher education.

35 One of the most complex issues that has arisen in the Bologna context has been that of **different paces of the implementation of the Process**, which can fundamentally endanger the vision of a common EHEA. Whilst some Western-European countries were much closer to the Bologna concepts at the starting point of the process others from mostly Eastern Europe found the path to be long and proper implementation much more difficult. This is causing a problem of **relevance** of the Bologna process mostly within the ›high scoring‹ countries, which are now calling to set new goals, rather than to fully implement the existing goals. This is basically a circumstance of à la carte approach, but also indicates that countries still have very different

goals and thus they are willing to be part of a multi-speed Bologna Process, indicating the classical dilemma of deepening cooperation versus expanding it.

36 The Bologna process is not alone in the European higher education arena. The European Union's **Lisbon agenda** is highly focused on higher education and **interferences** between the two processes have led to a lesser focus on the Bologna Process goals than on the Lisbon agenda points and to contradictions between goals within the two processes; such as the governance modes of higher education institutions.

37 When looking at the Bologna Process from a more external viewpoint there is little understanding of the differences between the Bologna Process and the Lisbon strategy. As Bologna is more widely known, it gets labelled for short-comings is not really responsible for. Bologna is thus used as **scapegoat** for either the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy goals or the implementation of whatever is convenient for the national government.

38 The **internal steering mechanisms and working procedures** of the Bologna Process need to be improved. Whilst the voluntary and dynamic cooperation manner of the Bologna Process has been an important precondition for its success, it can be said that transparent, democratic and commonly agreed upon procedures are needed in order to assure the long term equal involvement and commitment of the members and the consultative members.

39 As with any intergovernmental cooperation the administration of the Bologna Process is a very considerable task in order to sustain the joint work of forty-six countries. The countries taking up the responsibility of hosting the next ministerial conference and the Bologna Secretariat make a significant commitment to bringing this process further, which should be welcomed. In order to sustain this growing process and also to make the handover to respective next hosting countries smoother, there is a **need for agreed guidelines for the work of the secretariat**, especially given that there has been a tendency of a more political role of the hosting country in their secretariat function. Instead, the role for this more organisational chair should be to maintain the process' sustainability in a neutral way.

40 Countries appear to approach different action lines with different views and in the context of setting individual finish lines one must ask whether EHEA is just about increasing the attractiveness of individual countries or whether there is actually the aim of achieving a European dimension, that makes the continent's higher education systems better for its academic communities and societies as a whole. Still, a fundamental shift towards **countries identifying themselves with pan-European goals** and with a single educational, but also a cultural, area needs to happen, rather than only striving for promoting nationals system.

3 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The European Students' Union has been writing about the student perspective on the Bologna Process since it git formally involved in it. Four editions of the students' independent stocktaking report *Bologna With Student Eyes* between 2003 and 2009 shed light on the perception of those stakeholders, which are probably mostly targeted on the Bologna Process. These reported on the situation of higher education reform before each of the respective bi-annually held ministerial conferences.

For *Bologna With Student Eyes*, the elected representatives of the European Students' Union collected data—in the form of creating a detailed questionnaire on the status quo of the Bologna Process implementation—which was filled by the national unions of students, the members of ESU. The publication then essentially the analysis of the answers the questionnaires and were used to promote the student voice to the upcoming ministerial conferences. One aim was also to mirror the official stocktaking reports, for which the data on the implementation came from the ministries of the Bologna Process member countries. *Bologna With Student Eyes* has been established as an honest view on the actual progress through student eyes.

For the anniversary conference, now in 2010 ESU has not published another edition of *Bologna With Student Eyes*. Apart from the fact that after only one year since the last edition there would not be much new be to be told, the aim of *Bologna at the Finish Line* is different. With this publication—courageous enough to also critically review our work since 2001 when ESU got involved in the Bologna Process—ESU is attempting to take stock of the development over the ten years of life of the Bologna Process.

Bologna at the Finish Line measures the evolution of educational policy development and implementation in Europe in a temporal evolution, as opposed to taking a ›snapshot‹ of one specific moment in time. This affects the selection of methodology, but also puts a strong emphasis on the analytical process. *Bologna at the Finish Line* is forward-looking and presents both the challenges and opportunities facing the European Higher Education Area.

3.1 SELECTION OF METHODS

DESK RESEARCH

Bologna at the Finish Line is based on a comprehensive analysis of key publications and other relevant documents. The literature gathered through this exercise was put into matrices and systematically analysed. The data material consists of background documents, Bologna stocktaking reports, general reports for the Ministerial conferences, working group reports, Bologna-seminars, other stakeholder publica-

tions and statistics. The in-depth analysis of these documents provides data about the context and the history of the main policy developments, as well as information and understanding about recent and possible future developments. In addition, it provides an insight into how other stakeholders perceive the series of Bologna reforms.

Another important part of the desk research was the analysis of the *Bologna with the Student Eyes* publications from 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009. At the time of each publication, the Bologna Process was at very different stages and different topics were high on the agenda. All of the publications were based on questionnaires, completed by the ESU member national students' unions, but the questions asked and the conclusions drawn are specific to their context, as the implementation and development of the Bologna Process has not been a linear process. The *Bologna With Student Eyes* publications were analysed and compared to data from other areas of the desk research.

QUESTIONNAIRES

In order to present the students' view on the status of the implementation of the Bologna Process in 2010, it was vital to gather information and opinions from the various national students' unions. This was done through a questionnaire, which was sent out to the forty-five national unions that are full members of ESU. These forty-five national unions span thirty-seven different countries.

The questionnaires asked the national students' unions to state their view regarding the overall successes and challenges regarding Bologna implementation in their country. The goal of the questionnaire was therefore to give the national unions the possibility to present the effects of a decade of higher education reform, in their own country. The diversity between countries and cultures has influenced the way European-level reforms are implemented at the national and institutional level. It was therefore a necessity to include this perspective by creating the questionnaires.

Thirty-two national students' unions, from twenty-six different countries completed the questionnaire. Having received the responses, the thirty-two questionnaires were centralised according to topic, before the data was analysed. On the basis of this process, the questionnaires provided data that was used to draw conclusions and to make recommendations concerning future developments with in the European Higher Education Area.

The questionnaire had five parts. The first four parts consisted of questions relating to the topics of student-centred learning, financing of higher education, governance, student participation and transparency in the Bologna Process. The fifth part consisted of open questions regarding the views of the national unions on the stage of implementation of the Bologna Process and their visions for the future. The questionnaire was designed so that it would contribute data that was not possible to get from the

previous *Bologna With Student Eyes* publications. The questions-topics were chosen to reveal emerging trends that might not yet have reached the attention of other European-level stakeholders.

Thirteen national unions, from twelve different countries did not submit an answer, meaning that the methodology could have been improved through having a higher number of respondents to ensure that the answers were representative. In the interpretation of the answers, ESU has relied on the national unions to provide answers based information that is correct, relevant and representative of the situation in their country.

There are few students or student-representatives within the national unions that have witnessed the whole ten years of the Bologna process. The national unions can therefore provide current information about the status of implementation today, but cannot be expected to fully know the debate and developments that have occurred over the past ten years, within higher education reform.

INTERVIEWS

To supplement the two previously mentioned methods, it was decided to do a number of interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to get a broader insight into the past ten years of the Bologna Process in Europe, as seen from the eyes of the individuals involved.

This was done by interviewing key actors from several organisations, as well as interviewing actors that had contributed in the development of past and current policies. The interviewees were Lesley Wilson from the European University Association, Stefan Delplace from the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education and Peter Van Den Hijden from the European Commission, as well as Koen Geven, Bastian Baumann, Predrag Lazetic and Colin Tück, who are all former elected student representatives from ESU.

The former elected representatives were interviewed because of their unique insight into the history and moulding of the current policies, as they were present in the decision-making arena as students. The representatives of the other stakeholder organisations were chosen because of their personal experience and history in the Bologna Process and their specific point of view as a stakeholder.

In advance, the *Bologna at the Finish Line* team created an interview guide, in order to assure the quality of the interviews. The interviews were carried out either face to face, or over the telephone, and the interviews were later written-up, analysed and included in the *Bologna at the Finish Line* chapters.

The questions asked were open ended, in order to allow the interviewees to present their own views on the Bologna Process. The interview questions were chosen so that they included varying aspects of the Bologna Process. These included: mobility, the social dimension, financing of higher education, institutional governance, life-long learning, student-centred learning, the three-cycles system, transparency,

quality assurance, the links between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area and an open question on the emerging challenges.

The data collected through the interviews was used to elucidate the policy development in the Bologna Process and to provide input into the future development of the European Higher Education Area.

1 MOBILITY

Mobility has been an essential component of the Bologna Process, since its inception in 1999, with the general references made in the Bologna Declaration. Its development in more than ten years has been spectacular in terms of political attention, but less consistent in terms of real increases in the figures on the mobility of students, especially inside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In spite of this, mobility is one of the obvious barometers of the real existence of an EHEA, beyond the ministerial statements of success.

1.1 INTRODUCTION: MOBILITY IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Mobility in this chapter is being referred to as a study period taken abroad, including all its academic and social aspects (ESU 2007). When looking at the role of mobility as both a tool and an end in itself, this long-held Bologna action line may be considered to be one of the most complex and politically intricate priorities of the European Higher Education Area. Mobility has been tackled in virtually every defining moment of the Bologna Process, beginning in the 1999 Bologna declaration, which contained a lot of commitments to remove mobility obstacles and promote mobility schemes.

In Leuven/Louvain la Neuve (2009), a politically courageous, but still not completely clear mobility benchmark was agreed upon. This aimed to have at least twenty percent of the EHEA graduates are mobile by 2020, whilst also emphasising the need for balancing mobility so that brain-drain becomes less of a concern for the stability and sustainability of the EHEA (Communiqué 2009).

1.2 OVERVIEW AND EVOLUTION

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Mobility is seen to have at least a dual role in the eyes of most policy makers: one linked to the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area accentuating on the promotion and monitoring of the mobility flows across the forty-six Bologna countries, and the other relating to the internationalisation and attractiveness of the EHEA agenda, which has as a main focus the number of incoming mobile students from non-EHEA countries into EHEA systems. It is said that it would be desirable to keep a balance between the two strategic viewpoints; otherwise the tipping of the balance especially on the side of international attractiveness might undermine the overall Bologna agenda.

Mobility is perhaps one of the most blurred action lines, when it comes to measuring its progress, because the comparability of data related to the overall number of mobile students in Europe is extremely difficult to achieve. This is due to the various definitions of mobility, including the proxies used to define a mobile student (such as foreign nationality at graduation, foreign country of prior education, foreign country of residence etc.) and due to the different data gathering calendars of the main data collectors: EUROSTUDENT, EUROSTAT, EURYDICE, UOE, ECOTEC, ACA. If mobility is to be appropriately monitored, a dialogue should be started between the main international data collectors (OECD and UNESCO), as well as the European ones.

Among the member countries of the Bologna Process we can find all twenty-seven European Union states. One could expect a certain level of coherence between the progress in the common areas of the two political arenas—EU twenty-seven and Bologna forty-six. However, notwithstanding that a quantitative mobility benchmark was set at the EHEA level, one of the main deterrents for adopting a European Union level benchmark for mobility in 2009 was said to be the lack of clear data on mobility numbers, especially on what we consider to be mobility and thus what should be measured. Although the overall trend is for outbound mobility to increase, both in the EU and in the Bologna Area (an annual average of an increase in five percent between 2000 and 2006), the overall percentage of students enrolled in higher education abroad, in Europe is still quite low with only two percent of students with EU-27 citizenship studying abroad in Europe in 2006. Inbound mobility rates in Europe on the whole stood at seven percent, with around half of these students being non Bologna Area citizens. Yet, what is most interesting within the diploma mobility flows is perhaps that, *»despite a continuous increase of foreign students enrolled in the EU-27 at ISCED level 5A and 6 the proportion of them coming from the Bologna Area has dropped«* (EUROSTAT 2009:14). This is to say that although mobility numbers are slowly increasing, it seems that the decreasing diploma mobility numbers inside the EHEA could be considered a potential problem for the role of mobility as an essential building block for the Bologna space. As Predrag Lazetic underlines in the interview carried for the publication: *»Inter European student mobility stagnates, however there is more students from outside EHEA coming to Europe.«* (ESU 2010a).

The various facets of the debate on mobility will be added up in three main subchapters: financing and democratisation of mobility, degree and credit mobility and, finally, mobility and globalisation through the internationalisation agenda.

FINANCING AND DEMOCRATISATION OF MOBILITY

It is relevant to mention that mobility flows are heavily dependent on the financial support/assistance opportunities in place for students, in the sending and the receiving country/institution. Portability of grants and loans is the only concrete ministerial commitment in the field of financing mobility,

fig. 1—Situation of national students spending a period abroad that encounter problems meeting their living expenses from their grant or loan

- 🟢 None or almost none have problems
- 🟡 Few have problems
- 🟠 Some students have problems
- 🔴 Many students have problems
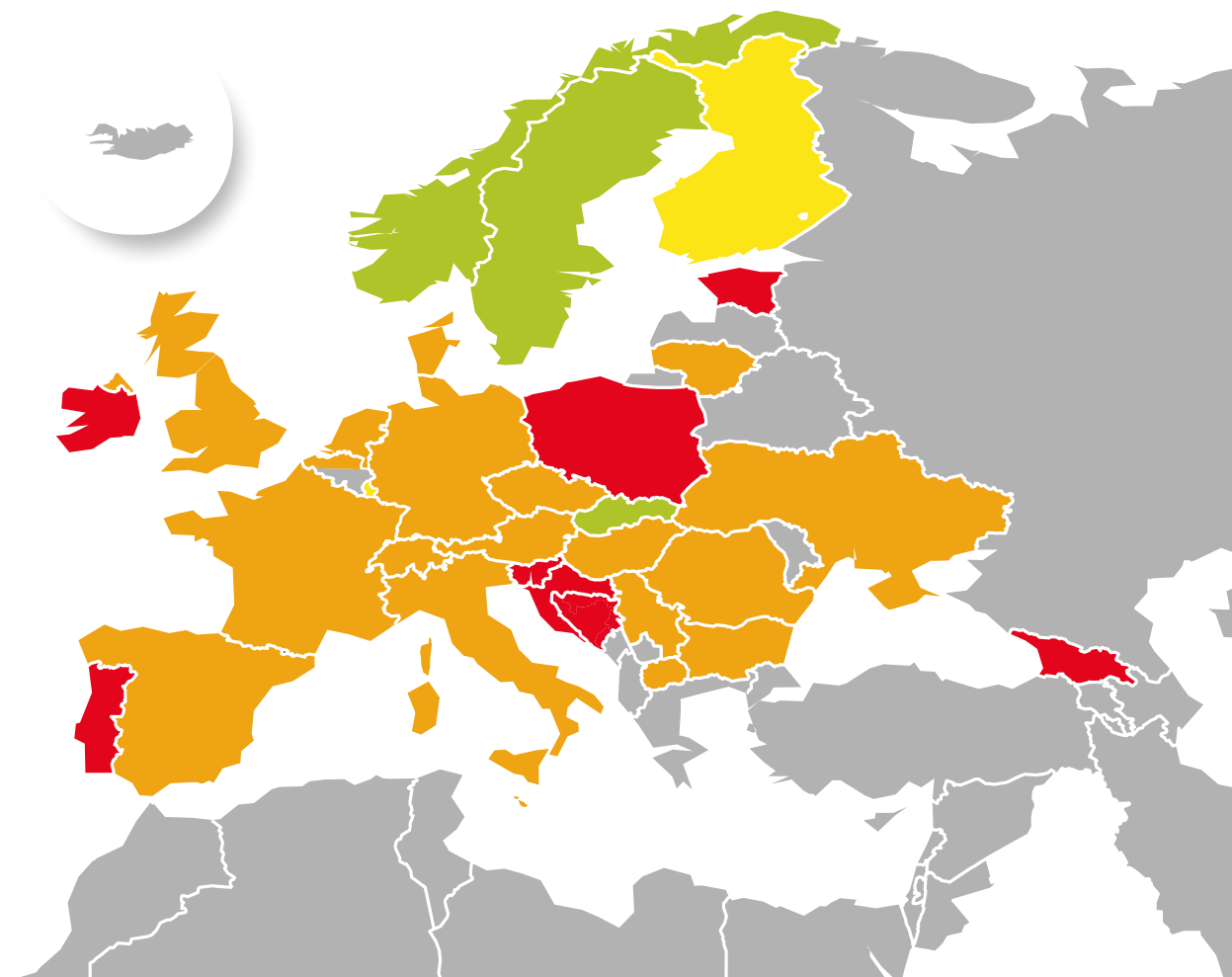
restated in Berlin, Bergen, London and Leuven/Louvain la Neuve. However, despite being over emphasised, the reluctance for real portability of national grants and loans persists, for very different reasons. According to Eurydice:

»A significant number of countries require several conditions to be fulfilled in order for students to access support, and it is this accumulation of restrictions that may prove an obstacle, and thus be a

significant factor limiting mobility. [...] In the case of Finland, it is students who wish to study entire qualifications abroad who encounter such restrictions, while support for shorter-term mobility is much more easily accessible« (2009:52).

This situation was also confirmed in 2009 *Bologna With Student Eyes* (ESU 2009), in which seventy-percent of the BWSE 2009 respondents pointed out that most or some of the foreign students have problems meeting their expenses with the available mobility funding (fig. 1). Also, according to Cradden (2008), fifty-nine percent of the student respondents were dissatisfied or entirely dissatisfied with the funding available for mobility. If one takes a closer look, it is quite clear that the different levels of funding needed in various EHEA countries highly influence the mobile students' perception, with regard to how adequate the mobility resources are.

The EUROSTUDENT/EUROSTAT analysis brings the documented proof that the EHEA is an environment in which *»in most countries, students from highly educated family backgrounds are more likely to have experienced a study-related stay abroad; this share was sometimes more than three times higher than for students from families with a low educational background«* (EUROSTAT 2009:14). The mobile student population is also quite stereotypical in its predominant features: over sixty percent of the ERASMUS students are between twenty-one and twenty-three years of age and students with children take up ERASMUS periods to a much lesser extent than others (ECOTEC 2006). The Erasmus Student Network's (ESN) annual surveys confirm the above mentioned sources, with regard to the limited outreach of mobility programmes.

With this situation in mind, the European Students' Union has repeatedly argued for an EHEA wide mobility fund, based on the CEEPUS contribution scheme and for a synchronisation of existing sources of funding at the European, national, regional and institutional level. ESU is quite wary of the setting-up of a European Union Loan Scheme for mobility, since students not reaching mobility programmes are already financially burdened and, as such, tend to be debt adverse. In the eyes of the students, mobility periods are risky from the academic quality point of view and, as such, a consumer model, traditionally associated with the loan schemes applies even less in this case. If mobile, one can be even less sure of the quality of a programme, the environment in which one will be studying, if recognition will take place fully etc. Therefore, only grants would stimulate people to seek experience abroad. ESU also warns of the repercussions arising from confusion between financial assistance for mobility (the loan system), with real financial support (grants). Balanced and significantly increased mobility flows will certainly not be possible only with the assistance systems currently in the picture, especially at a time in which taking a loan is regarded as a high risk undertaking by most students, due to the unpredictability of the job opportunities after graduation.

In this light, it is quite shocking that the only network existing within the Bologna Process related to portability of grants and loans, expert network on student support—NESSIE, worked predominantly on methods of how to avoid double grants for mobile students, from both the sending and receiving country, instead of »helping to identify and overcome obstacles to the portability of grants and loans«, as the London Ministerial Communiqué requested.

DIPLOMA AND CREDIT MOBILITY

According to the background paper presented by the EUROSTAT/EURYDICE/EUROSTUDENT, to the Bologna Follow-Up Group Working Group on mobility (in January 2010), the three types of international student mobility are as follows:

A Diploma mobility: doing a programme in a different country.
B Credit mobility: doing some courses in a different country within the scope of the programme in the home institution.
C Other short-term mobility: going abroad during a higher education programme for an activity relevant for the studies and for a relevant period of time (language course, traineeship, internship etc.).

Academically meaningful mobility implies that every individual student can choose the most suitable mobility scheme, according to his or her academic path and interest. The above mentioned forms of mobility are thus equally valuable in building the mobility culture amongst the student body, if properly recognised. There seems to be a growing interest in diploma mobility, due to the simplified recognition procedures that come with it and the less burdening administrative procedures for securing financial support. However, it is proven that credit mobility has an intrinsic value for the quality of one's higher education experience and is also an eye-opener to new cultures and modes of teaching and learning. Between sixty-five and ninety-five percent of ERASMUS students reported large changes or changes to some extent in their career-related attitudes and aspirations, the broadening of their general education, their personal values and their understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background (Otero and McCoshan 2006).

It is claimed that the introduction of the three-cycle degree structure has hampered the mobility opportunities, especially during the first cycle. However, Trends V found that *»Incoming and outgoing student mobility is reported to have risen over the last three years in over 70 % of Trends V respondents [...] Often a decline in mobility could be directly attributed to the inflexible nature of some programmes, for example all modules being made compulsory or rules being implemented stating that the thesis work must*

be done at the home university« Crosier 2007:45). It is clear that without sound institutional commitment, we will not see the mobility figures rise and the mobile student body diversifying to the extent the Bologna ministers are aiming for.
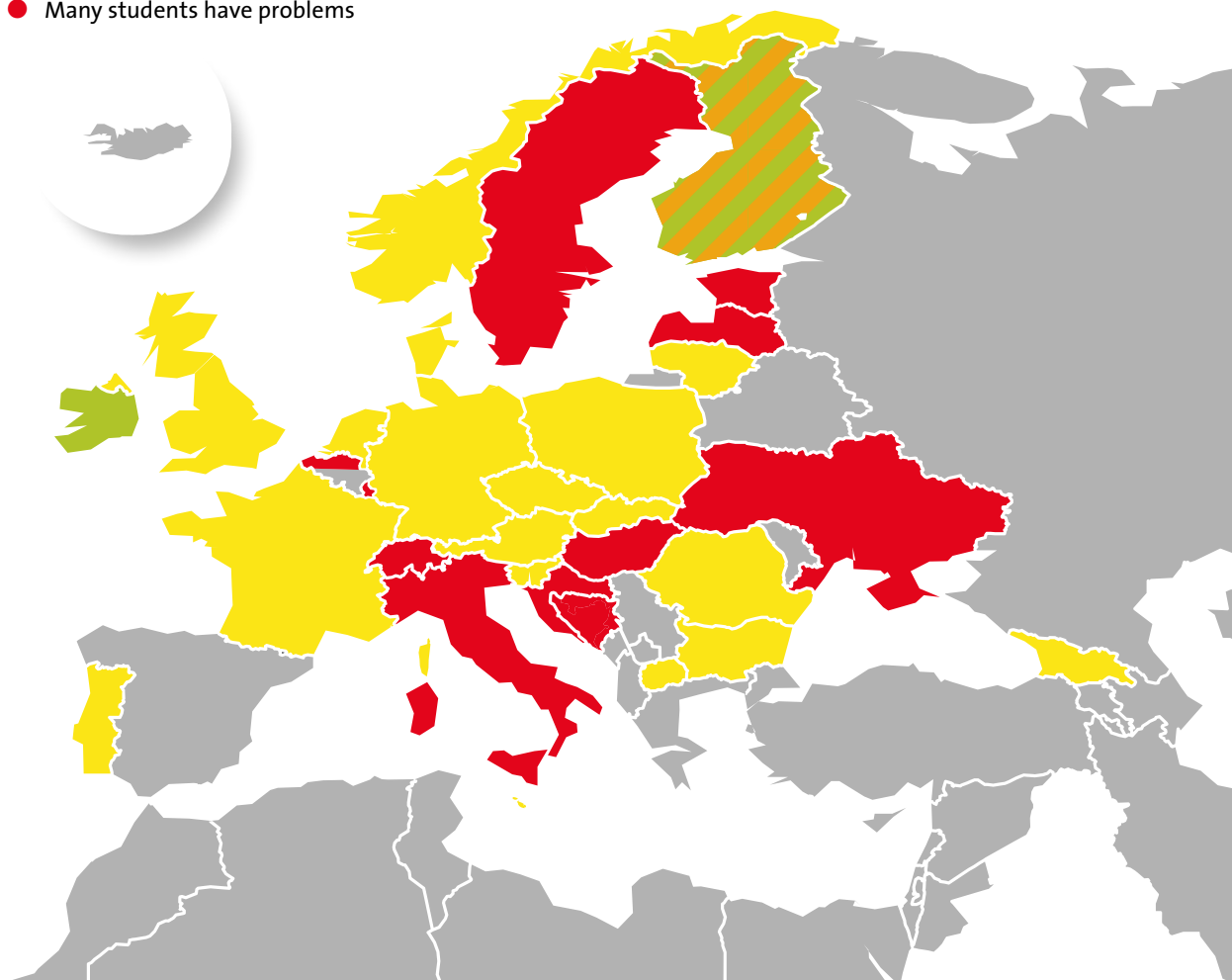
This factor adds to the problems of recognition of ECTS gained during a mobility period abroad: Eighty-five percent of the BWSE 2009 respondents have pointed out that many or some students have problems in this regard, which is consistent with the 2009 Bologna Data collection and Stocktaking reports (fig. 2).

The problems with the area of recognition and implementation of the three-cycle degree structure—as well as the well known and extensively documented problems related to student support services for mobile students and language provision—might signal very different commitments on the side of higher education institutions to removing mobility obstacles.

MOBILITY AND GLOBALISATION THROUGH THE INTERNATIONALISATION AGENDA

Internationalisation has become one of the main priorities of EHEA governments and higher education institutions, with student mobility being seen as one of the main components of this process. However, there is more to this interest than a pure desire for academic exchange and networking.

A very prominent EHEA promotion of the global dimension has been mainstreamed into institutional strategies for attracting mobile students and has become the ›quality seal‹ of many institutions. This tendency has been captured quite clearly in EUA's Trends V report: *»[...] the institutional focus is in many cases on international rather than EU students [...] There is also a growing attention in some countries to the recruitment of non-EU fee paying students. As well as furthering academic and research links with other regions of the world, these students provide an independent funding stream for the institution, which in some cases is used to make up part of the shortfall in national funding to meet the full economic cost of EU students«* (Crosier 2007:43).

fig. 3—Introduction of tuition fees for non-European/non-EU students

- ● No fees at the moment
- ● Discussions about introducing fees
- ● Fees already exist; reduction proposed
- ● Fees already exist; no changes proposed
- ● Fees already exist; increase proposed

Housing	17			15	
Social Benefits	14		19		
Right to Work	9		23		
Financial Support	6		27		
Tuition Fees	12		20		

0 %   20 %   40 %   60 %   80 %   100 %
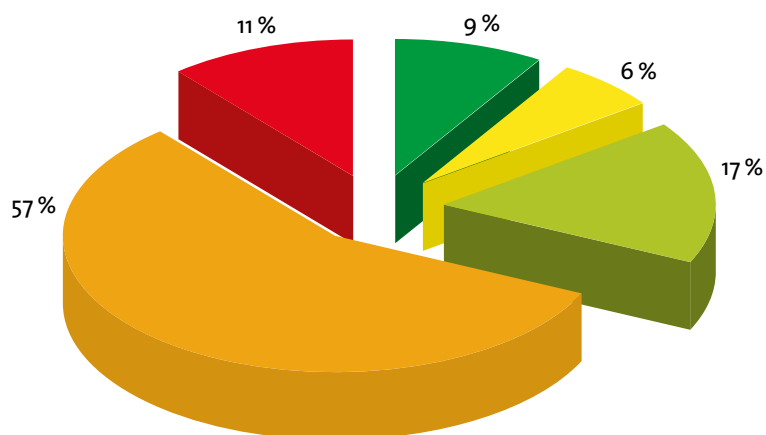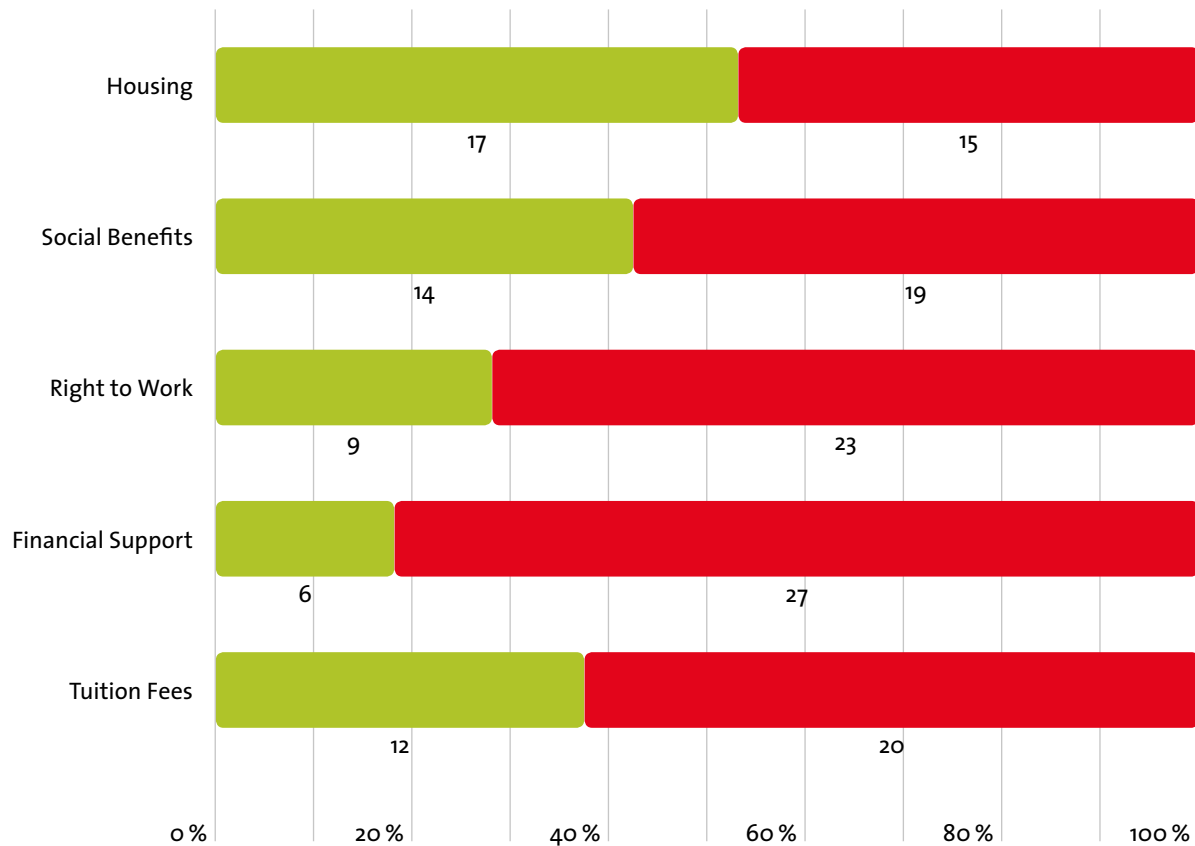
fig. 4—Treatment of non-European/ non-EU students in home higher education institutions

● same
● different

What is worrying is that the *Bologna With Student Eyes* survey (ESU 2009:152), besides confirming this tendency, draws attention to the fact that seventy-seven percent of the international students pay tuition fees (fig. 3) and twenty-seven out of thirty-two respondents stated that these students are not treated in the same way as domestic students, especially with regard to student support services or administrative procedures (right to work, social benefits (fig. 4)).

Looking at the issue at hand, one might ask if we could be witnessing inward mobility, being used as a backdoor for the privatisation agenda for higher education. This is especially so, if we notice the latest attempts to combine the institutional marketing with help from the EU level, in the form of a global university ranking that would focus on the characteristic features of European Higher Education Systems.

Finally, if we look at the countries that attract most non-EU students, we can notice the presence of special agencies in charge of the promotion of the national higher education system on various continents, but that these have little focus on promoting the EHEA as a whole.

The concept of ›balanced mobility‹ may have only been introduced in the Leuven/Louvain la Neuve Ministerial meeting, but it is clear that the fear of brain-drain has been looming in the higher education arena for a while and is one of the reasons why countries and even higher education institutions are reluctant to support mobility. In the interviews conducted for this publication, Bastian Baumann made references to obvious imbalances: *»students are mainly travelling from the south to the north and from the east to the west of the European Higher Education Area, with some notable exceptions such as Spain«* (ESU 2010b). Within this context, we have to ask ourselves; are the current information sources the best ones for prospective mobile students? It might seem that ranking information and promotional materials do not provide the accurate picture needed for a real increase in the number of mobile students'.

From the European Students' Union's perspective there is an immediate risk of sacrificing the final set-up and consolidation of the European Higher Education Area, in favour of trying to window-dress the existing national higher education systems and gain as much international fame as possible. This is done in the name of acquiring a bigger share of the ›global higher education market‹. Indeed, it is not only the countries outside of the European Higher Education Area, which are targeted, but also the non-EU/EEA countries that are treated in the same manner, generating a deep rift between the status and opportunities of students in Bologna countries.

The European Students' Union argues for a clear focus on the value of balanced mobility inside the EHEA, from the side of both governments and higher education institutions, with the support of the European organisations and structures in place.

1.3   CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

It is the belief of ESU that mobility progress depends on the vision for mobility as the rule, rather as than the exception for each EHEA student. As such, ESU draws attention to the need for the following future actions:

1   Stop the national and institutional trend of focusing mostly on non-EHEA incoming students and instead work on incentivising balanced outward and inward mobility across all EHEA countries.

2   Expand the possibilities for financial support within the European higher education area to more than an EU loan scheme, so that there can be hope for real progress towards the agreed Bologna mobility benchmark.

3   Avoid having inconsistent policy-development between the EHEA/EU levels, mainly with reference to the mobility financial support systems and to the design of indicators for the mobility benchmark.

4   Design European, national and institutional strategies that prioritise mobility as a tool for European integration. Attention must be paid to avoiding the limitations of mobility opportunities as a result of the institutional mission diversification and the development of new transparency tools, through possible obstacles to recognition and institutional partnerships.

Considerations one, two and three are closely linked with EU-level initiatives or policies, which shows the influence of the EU mobility agenda within the EHEA. As such, a meaningful debate should be started with regard to the similarities and possible differences between the EU and EHEA agendas on mobility.

1.4   CONCLUSIONS

When looking at the role of mobility as both a tool and an end in itself, this long-held Bologna action line may be considered to be one of the most complex and politically intricate priorities of the EHEA.

In order for mobility to achieve its full mission—academic and cultural meaningfulness, networking, tolerance and global active citizenship building, experiencing new modes of learning and contributing to the quality enhancement of the academic environment—we need to fully understand the benefits of mobility and the necessary support for them to become a reality. In this regard and after ten years of mobility focus within the Bologna Process, ESU concludes that:

1   There is a lack of overall financial support for covering the entire EHEA mobility scope. Unfortunately, no financial support system for mobility has been agreed at the Bologna level, which makes the adoption EHEA level ›twenty percent mobile by 2020‹ benchmark for mobility a shallow undertaking for increasing mobility levels.

2   Mobility is seen as a potential market and thus an extra funding source for higher education institutions, rather than a way of fostering academic quality enhancement and personal development. There seems to be confusion between the goals of the EU Lisbon Strategy and the opening up of the EU/EEA labour market for highly qualified candidates and the overarching purposes of mobility in the EHEA. The aim of balancing mobility and using it as a building block for the EHEA is seriously being jeopardised by this increasing tendency, and brain-drain is definitely an issue concerning many Bologna member states.

3 The institutional commitment to mobility is unequal and disproportionately focused on incoming rather than outgoing students (with notable exceptions). Higher education institutions should rethink their internal rules if mobility is to be a part of institutional strategies.

4 Lack of recognition remains one of the main deterrents to going abroad for those aiming at academically meaningful mobility. This is also the conclusion of the Erasmus Student Network PRIME 2009 study, which concluded that only sixty-six percent of the ERASMUS students receive full recognition of their studies abroad. Respecting learning agreements, proper implementation of ECTS and diploma supplements and respecting the Lisbon Recognition convention are just a few of the actions needed to remove this significant obstacle for mobility.

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2 CYCLES AND ECTS

»We must start to trust the system in order to fully realise the potential of the Bologna Process«
Bastian Baumann, Secretary General of the Magna Charta Observatory (ESU 2010a).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The desire to facilitate mobility and to ensure the comparability of degrees were key elements of the 1999 Bologna Declaration. This chapter shall deal with two of the most striking aspects of the Bologna Process, namely the establishment of a universally accepted degree system based on three-cycles, and the introduction of a system of credits for transfer and accumulation (ECTS). Both issues are fundamental building blocks of the EHEA and central in the paradigm shift towards student-centred learning.

2.2 OVERVIEW

CYCLES

The adoption of the three-cycle system is one of the pillars of the Bologna process and the implementation of this degree structure is essential in order to facilitate mobility and create comparable degrees.

It is however important not to forget precisely how diverse the European systems of higher education actually were prior to the Bologna Process. This incompatibility translated into elevated obstacles for mobility and the recognition of degrees.

Comparability and compatability of degrees was a priority from the very start of the Bologna Process and had already been mentioned in the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998: *»The international recognition and attractive potential of our systems are directly related to their external and internal readabilities«* (Declaration 1998:1).

Initially this was supposed to happen through the: *»Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate«* (Declaration 1999:3). The focus of the early years of reform was to start with the first two cycles and only when ›basic‹ bachelor-master questions were more or less solved, would room for discussion on the third cycle materialise. The preparatory work for the ministerial meeting in Berlin also note that *»[...] an answer to a need for a transparent, readable and comparable »third degree« should be elaborated seriously in the next follow-up period 2003–2005«* (Zgaga 2003:48). Reference to the Bologna Seminar on Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society held in Salzburg in 2005, must be made when discussing the development of the third cycle in the Bologna

Process. It was this seminar that led to the development of the ›Salzburg principles‹ (Christensen 2005) and later formed the basis of further policy development on doctoral education. Doctoral education was then referred to in the ministerial communiqué from the same year and included as the third cycle in the Bergen Communiqué (2005).

»*Achieving the goal of implementing the first and second cycle degree system across all higher education in the EHEA seems to be only a question of time*« (Rauhvargers 2009:6). Although the two degree structure has been widely implemented, there are still a number of challenges.

First and foremost, a lot of first cycle students have difficulties accessing the second cycle, even within the same field of studies (Crosier et.al. 2007, Rauhvargers 2009, ESU 2009). ESU observes that this is particularly the case when students wish to pursue a masters degree at a university, when coming from a more profession-focused university college. The conclusion of EUA (which ESU agrees with), is that »*if the two cycles are to be used as a means of creating more flexibility in learning paths, these practices will have to be reconsidered*« (Crosier et.al. 2007:23). In order to create this flexibility, institutions must revise their practices in order to allow students coming from the university-college sector to get their degrees recognised by the universities. In many countries, the original bachelor degree is not recognised or the student may have to take additional courses in order to be enrolled at a university.

fig. 5—Number of countries applying special requirements for admission to a second cycle programme, for students coming from other fields of studies.

● In some cases
● Yes

(Rauhvargers 2009:35)
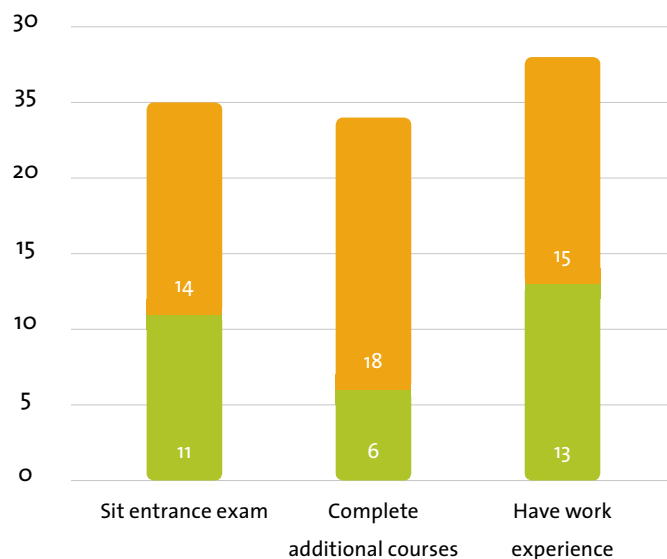
In addition, several national students' unions report in the questionnaires, that both the new and old systems co-exist (ESU 2010b). It is important to note that students enrolled in ›old‹ programmes are allowed to finish and receive the ›old‹ degree. The fact that both ›old‹ and ›new‹ programmes co-exist however undermines many of the goals of the Bologna Process: *»Rather than thinking in terms of new educational paradigms and re-considering curricula on the basis of learning outcomes, the first reflex has been to make a cut in the old long cycle and thus immediately create two cycles where previously one existed«* (Crosier et.al. 2007:22). Students report that reform of the degree structure does not include the necessary redevelopment of curricula and there is clearly a need for further addressing the implementation of curricula reform. Changes in degree structure must be followed by the implementation of the student-centred learning paradigm. This paradigm shift towards student-centred learning is still underway, but member unions have remarked that the momentum of this shift is slowing down and key elements of the Bologna-based string of reforms are not fully implemented.

In discussing cycles, reference must be made to the discussion on qualification frameworks. As pointed out by Lesley Wilson, when interviewed for this publication *»there is still a lot of work to be done with employability. Unless this is solved, the 3 cycles system has failed«* (ESU 2010c). Employability is primarily dealt with in chapter: B9. It must however be noted that increasing the employability of students requires a degree system that is comparable and widely recognised.

The major challenge when discussing cycles remains the third cycle. This can be attributed to the fact that it was included at later stage in the process than the first two cycles and thus lacks the natural integration. Additionally, as the outcome of the 2009 *Bologna With Student Eyes* questionnaire highlights, the status of doctoral candidates varies considerable across the signatory countries. Although the Salzburg-principles map out concrete guidelines on the third cycle, they are still not universally used and implemented.

ESU holds that, in line with the Salzburg principles, stakeholders should acknowledge the fact that: *»Doctoral candidates as early stage researchers (and therefore) should be recognised as professionals—with commensurate rights«* (Christensen 2005:4). Furthermore, ESU emphasises the importance of high quality in supervision and assessment, adequate funding and the promotion of mobility within the third cycle. The legal status of doctoral candidates varies from them being deemed as students in some countries, to being considered as early-stage researchers in others, consequently causing difficulties when creating a unified policy on the third cycle. Of moot point remains the status of part-time doctoral candidates. In addition, there is a major concern that many doctoral candidates use far too much time on their doctoral education with work on the doctoral dissertation taking up a particularly large amount of time (Rauhvargers 2009).

Cycles are also linked with mobility, which is another key feature of the Bologna Process. Lack of proper implementation of the Bologna degree structure may hinder mobility.

ECTS

Conceived as a part of the ERASMUS programme, primarily as a mobility recognition tool, the ECTS was launched with the ERASMUS programme (launched in 1987). ECTS was thus not launched within the Bologna Process implementation. *»A pilot scheme was launched for the 1989/90 academic year in five subject areas: History, Chemistry, Business Studies, Mechanical Engineering and Medicine«* (Jones and Liempt 2010). Based on mutual trust between institutions in order to ensure quality, ECTS quickly gained momentum.

From the very start of the Bologna Process it was stated that there was going to be a credit system, but it was only later in the process that ECTS emerged as the European standard system. The positive attributes of ECTS were however acknowledged and the concept was described as a ›best-practice‹ tool in terms of credit transfer, in both the Sorbonne and the Bologna declarations. Soon, most countries started adopting the ECTS as the main credit accumulation and transfer system. In the 2001-communiqué however, the ECTS was still not adopted as the European standard system, but the 2001-communiqué stressed that qualifications should be: *»supported by a credit system such as the ECTS or one that is ECTS-compatible, providing both transferability and accumulation functions [...]«* (2001:2). It is important to note that ministers emphasised the credit system as tool for transferability and accumulation. Originally ECTS was envisaged solely as a transfer system and it was only later that it developed into an accumulation system.

An important Bologna seminar on this topic was held in Zurich in October, 2002 titled ›Credit transfer and Accumulation: The Challenge for Institutions and Students‹. This seminar was important in terms of recognising ECTS as the standard European system. In 2003 the ministers noted that: *»[...] ECTS is increasingly becoming a generalised basis for the national credit systems«* (Communiqué 2003:4). The ministers stressed that the ECTS system should evolve further as an accumulation system, which should be applied ›consistently‹ in the European Area of Higher Education. This was also stressed in the recommendations from the general rapporteur Prof Pavel Zgaga (2003).

The implementation of the ECTS system appeared to run smoothly in the following years and the stocktaking report (McKenna et.al. 2005) had very positive comments on the status of implementation on this topic. The ministerial communiqué of the same year does not mention ECTS, underlining the impression that ECTS at that time was *en route* to being fully implemented within a few years. This was however not the case.

Learning outcomes and the entire outcome-based education paradigm rely heavily on the proper link with curricula and ECTS. Unless learning outcomes are clearly linked with credits (ECTS), the actual use of learning outcomes will be limited. This link is underlined as a major challenge in the Trends IV publication: *»However, it is still often perceived as a tool to translate national systems into a European language,*

rather than as a central feature of curriculum design« (Reichert and Tauch 2005:5). ESU also notes this challenge: *»Especially the student workload is neglected, [...]. Therefore there is the danger that ECTS cannot be used properly, neither for transfer nor for accumulation purposes«* (ESU 2005:5). As ESU pointed out two years later *»[...] key features are not properly implemented«* (ESU 2007:7). The ministerial communiqué of the same year also dealt with this issue by stating that *»efforts should concentrate [...] on proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload«* (Communiqué 2007:2).

The major challenges facing the implementation of ECTS have been consistent in recent years and it is a widespread impression that central elements of the ECTS system are only partially implemented or not implemented at all. The 2009 Stocktaking notes that *»[...] there are two main challenges in fully implementing ECTS: measuring credits in terms of student workload and linking them with learning outcomes«* (Rauhvargers 2009:10).

De facto involvement of all stakeholders is important, in order to bridge the gap between promises made and what materialises in practice. This was stressed at the Bologna seminar in Moscow (Bologna Process 2008).

fig. 6—Linking credits with learning outcomes (number of countries giving each answer).

(Rauhvargers 2009:79)
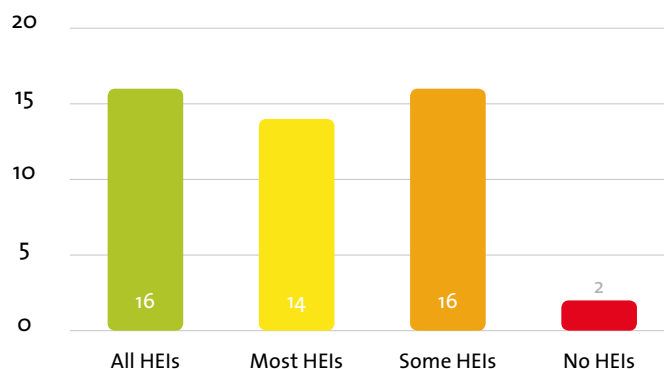
ESU's member unions also paint a somewhat grim picture when it comes to the implementation of ECTS. There is an overall inclination towards superficial implementation, without the link to workload and learning outcomes. Several countries implement ECTS without linking it properly to cycle descriptors and competences. Quite a few member unions have pointed to the faulty implementation of ECTS as one of the main challenges facing the Bologna Process at the national level, in their responses to the BAFL questionnaire. There is also widespread concern that unless this is immediately addressed, students will necessarily face a dysfunctional system that undermines other elements of Bologna reform—notably

learning outcomes. ESU has been concerned about this development for some time: *»while ECTS should allow flexibility in the way the education paths are built, the type of implementation observed sometimes undermines that possibility, especially at the institutional level«* (ESU 2009:92). A tool which was originally conceived to enhance mobility is now seen as an obstacle to increased flexibility and mobility. This is linked to diploma supplements and the recognition of degrees.

2.3 CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

It is a clear trend that both cycles and ECTS are on the way to being implemented. However, in order to fully tap into the potential of the Bologna Process, further focus on implementation is needed. This is particularly true when it comes to ECTS, since there is much work yet to be done linking credits with descriptor and learning outcomes. ESU observes a clear trend that ECTS is durable. ESU also notes that the focus for the near future should be to implement and fully realise the potential of both the degree structure and the ECTS.

One of the major challenges facing doctoral candidates is their ambiguous status. When being considered as either students, early stage researchers or employees, the variations in definitions make it difficult to create unified policies, owing to the heterogeneous nature of the group. The difference in definitions is also reflected in the way doctoral candidates are represented. Some national students' unions represent doctoral candidates, but not all national unions do. In addition, EURODOC represents doctoral candidates and the cooperation between EURODOC and ESU is therefore important. This is becoming increasingly important, because the third cycle is facing further reform and implementation.

2.4   CONCLUSIONS

Looking at how major areas of the reforms have been adopted at a national level, it is important to remember how different the European system of higher education is now, especially compared to the situation at the end of the nineties. Both on the issues of ECTS and degree structure there has been widespread reform and substantial elements of the initial objectives have been met. There are however reasons for concern:

- When it comes to ECTS, several national students' unions and other stakeholders (notably EUA), remark that the implementation of the essential elements has been superficial. This is particularly worrying when linking ECTS to workload and learning outcomes; the latter being essential to move towards true student-centred learning
- The first two cycles have been widely implemented, but there are still challenges concerning admission to the second cycle for students, even within their own field of study.
- Several countries have kept their old degree system whilst introducing the three-cycle system. This has lead to confusion and superficial implementation.
- Reforms in degree structure are not matched with reforms of curricula and teaching and there are thus substantial elements of the Bologna Process that are not implemented.
- The third cycle has not yet been sufficiently integrated within the Bologna Process. In this respect, further action is mandatory.

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3 RECOGNITION

Recognition is a very important dimension of the Bologna process, regardless of whether it involves degrees, competences, or the acknowledgement of prior learning outcomes. Ultimately, recognition is crucial to mobility, to life-long learning, to access, to employability and—ultimately—to the very existence of a coherent European Higher Education Area.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Recognition of qualifications as a process, began long before Bologna. Of course, the initial levels of discussion were based around the recognition of degrees and qualifications, that were needed for fostering of academic and professional mobility.

Attempts to streamline the process culminated in *The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, which was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted by national representatives in April 1997 (Council of Europe 1997). The Convention—usually referred to as the Lisbon Recognition Convention—has since been gradually ratified by almost all Bologna signatories, making the recognition of qualifications one of the few Bologna dimensions that is regulated within a formal agreement.

3.2 OVERVIEW

RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

The Lisbon Recognition convention set out the main principles behind the process of recognition of attained qualifications:

- The concept of ›substantial differences‹: countries which ratified the Convention have been obliged to recognise foreign qualifications directly, unless ›substantial differences‹ between a foreign and a home qualification can be proven.
- Holders of qualifications issued in one country shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another country.
- The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.

- Each country shall recognise qualifications—whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees—as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system, unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.
- All countries shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students, in order to facilitate recognition. The Diploma Supplement is an instrument developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO that aims to describe the qualification in an easily understandable way and relates it to the higher education system within which it was issued.

The national stocktaking reports show that the compliance of national legislation with the Lisbon Recognition Convention has increased over time, but progress has also been slow, considering the fact that the Convention preceded the Bologna process itself. What is lacking however, is a coherent approach on the issue of the recognition of qualifications across EHEA, as the approaches differ from country to country. This has been visible both in the National Action Plans and in the persistence of problems of recognition signalled by mobile students in many Bologna signatory countries.

There are also problems in implementing the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and its subsidiary texts at institutional level, facilitated recognition being sometimes viewed as a reduction of institutional autonomy. This problem persists despite the advantage brought about by the recognition of foreign qualifications, which would likely bolster both mobility and cross-border cooperation. Some countries have tackled the issue at institutional level, by including institutional recognition procedures in the list of aspects evaluated within both internal and external QA.

As shown in the *Bologna With Student Eyes* 2005 publication, the existence of the ENIC-NARIC network—with roots dating as early as 1984—has also brought valuable support for the recognition of foreign degrees and periods of study, especially in the cases in which they act as the decision-making body (ESU 2005:32).

RECOGNITION OF PERIODS OF STUDIES

One of the areas in which unions have signalled a repeated problem linked with recognition, is in connection with periods of study abroad that occur via mobility schemes (ESU 2009:70). Recognition of studies is a major problem for mobile students, and often acts as a discouraging factor for students who want to conduct part of their studies in a different institution. This is especially problematic if there have been prior cases of students having to repeat parts of various programmes due to recognition problems.

Indeed, there are signs that: *»the level of problems associated with the recognition of credits for students returning from a period of study abroad remains stubbornly high. 47 % of institutions admit that some students have problems with the recognition of their credits gained abroad, an insignificant decrease since 2003. 48 % venture to state that none of their students have such problems, which is likewise only a small improvement from the Trends III response (in 2003)«* (Crosier 2007:40).

The BWSE survey noted that students in numerous countries face continuous problems in getting their periods of study abroad recognised.

THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

One of the most visible tools for the recognition of qualifications developed within the Bologna context is the Diploma Supplement. After being cited in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Diploma Supplement became part of the Bologna declaration under the action line of *»Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system«* (1999:3). The necessity of the Diploma Supplement was stressed in the Prague Communiqué (2001), but in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), a set of specific objectives followed the Diploma Supplement; namely that every student graduating from 2005 should receive it automatically and free of charge, issued in a widely spoken European language. Ministers also reaffirmed that institutions and employers should actually use the Diploma Supplement to foster employability and ensure academic recognition for further studies. In the London Communiqué (2007), Ministers called for a coherent implementation at the national and institutional level regarding the Diploma Supplement, among other tools for recognition.

ESU has supported the Diploma Supplement as an instrument for creating transparency, supporting mobility and promoting employability in Europe, following the objectives from the Berlin Communiqué. Recognition of qualifications and the promotion of mobility between higher education institutions in Europe could also be improved through the use of the Diploma Supplement (ESU 2008). In the case where a student has accumulated more credits than needed for the degree, these credits must also be recorded and should be enclosed in the Diploma Supplement (ESU 2007a).

»The third cycle studies are diverse across Europe and the links between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area face several challenges. In the eyes of ESU it would be beneficial for the graduates from doctoral studies to receive a Diploma Supplement. This would improve the employability of doctoral candidates by providing transparency about their qualifications for employers« (ESU 2007b).

Bologna With Student Eyes shows that, from the point of view of the national students' unions, most students in the European Higher Education Area receive the Diploma Supplement, but that the main concern is that there is a generally low level of awareness of the Diploma Supplement by employers and the general public.

Overall however, measurement of results of the 2005, 2007 and 2009 *Bologna With Student Eyes* publications shows considerable progress from the very low level of usage of Diploma Supplements at the middle of the last decade.

National students' unions across Europe have also identified probleme; wither the Diploma Supplement is not issued automatically to all students, or it is not free of charge or is only issued in a local language. Another problem imposed on the students is the quality of the Diploma Supplement, which is not consistent and is dependent on the individual institution.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a hotly debated issue in some countries, with the overall situation at European level being very diverse. There are few countries that have comprehensive national policies on RPL, and it is often at institutional level that this issue is tackled, with diverging practices in different fields of study. In theory, a switch to outcome-based learning and the definition of qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes, creates the premise for the recognition of prior learning to take shape. However, there is still a lot of opposition and in many countries there is a stance of recognising only those learning outcomes that are achieved in an institutional setting.

However, different trends can be identified across Europe, from the perspective of the students' unions. The following are mapped out, as based on the 2007 and 2009 *Bologna With Student Eyes* publications:

Countries where recognition of prior learning is possible and functioning

In some countries procedures for the recognition of prior learning are in place, facilitating life-long learning, and showing an open attitude towards outcomes-based and defined education. Students in some countries (examples include Sweden, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands and France) are able to get recognition for prior and alternative learning within public institutions, as a result of the existence of national policies on the issue. The procedures that are used for RPL vary from country to country. For example, out of twenty-five ESU unions which have reported some form of RPL in their countries, in 2009, eleven have reported that fees are attached to the recognition process.

Countries where RPL is accessible only partially or at institutional level

In some countries, (examples include the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the United Kingdom and Belgium), progress has been made at the institutional level, and RPL is generally part of the public discussion on education (BWSE, ESU 2009). Whilst this creates the premise for a generalisation of RPL at the national level, at the present, students might still face problems in having prior learning experiences recognised in all higher education institutions. This lack of consistency means that potential students face differentiated recognition of their prior learning achievements, based on the institutions they apply for. Furthermore, the scope of RPL in these countries tends to be rather limited in scope, and to be largely used to facilitate access to particular programmes.

Countries where RPL is difficult and/or very limited

As previous *Bologna With Student Eyes* surveys have shown, students in most Central, Southern and Eastern European countries cannot expect much in the way of prior learning, as there is no national framework regulating it and institutions themselves have made very little headway on the issue of RPL (ESU 2009).

In many of these countries, even if RPL exists at the institutional level, the scope of prior learning recognition is much reduced, with usage often being directed as a waiver for entry conditions onto some programmes, or as a source for extra credits in the same programmes.

Methodological problems in the definition of and research on RPL, among national students' unions

A particular note is struck by the fact that there is no particular definition of what recognition of prior learning is. As such, ESU has used, in all of its previous *Bologna With Student Eyes* publications, references such as the availability of RPL in the legal context, or in institutional practice. However, many of the national unions have had problems with identifying the level at which RPL was common practice in their national setting. This indicates that there is a low level of information about RPL procedures, and a lack of consistency in tackling the issue. The controversial statute of RPL is further evidenced by the fact that there is no generally accepted high-quality way of implementing the process, either among policymakers or students.

Something else to note is the increasing perception that the recognition of prior learning is no longer deeply linked with the development of a comprehensive national qualifications framework. Indeedit can be seen that there is only limited correlation between the countries that have functioning National Qualification Frameworks in place and those that have RPL procedures set up. In the *Bologna With Student Eyes* 2009 survey, only fifteen percent of interviewed unions identified RPL as part of the development of qualification frameworks (ESU 2009).

3.3 CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

There needs to be a clear understanding of the fact that without proper recognition procedures for all types of learning, the mainstream goals of the Bologna process—or common European goals of increasing mobility, inter-institutional cooperation and increasing access to education—are going to be difficult to achieve.

ESU believes that for a truly social education, which reflects the needs of society, the recognition of prior learning is a particularly enticing tool in developing improved access to life-long learning and in assuring that no form of learning goes unnoticed in the formal settings of education.

3.4 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, recognition is older than the Bologna process itself. It has benefitted from a ›head start‹, but still faces many obstacles, despite the fact that many Bologna action lines (such as quality assurance and qualification frameworks) have created mechanisms that should enhance trust and streamline procedures.

- The recognition of studies has progressed considerably, but there are many challenges ahead. Students often cite this as one of the major barriers to mobility.
- The recognition of prior learning is a valuable tool for life-long learning, recognition of studies, outcomes-based learning and access to degrees. Lack of acknowledgement in some countries constitutes a major obstacle to the development of a socially cohesive education system.
- Recognition of prior learning is understood differently from country to country and is often used within a limited scope.
- The Diploma Supplement is a key achievement of the Bologna Process and remains absolutely necessary for all students graduating from higher education institutions in Europe.

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4 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Since the mid 1990s, quality assurance of higher education in Europe has developed substantially, especially relating to a broad European dimension based on cooperation between stakeholders and policy makers. Despite the development and extensive focus on quality assurance, active and genuine student involvement still remains to become an integral part of quality assurance processes at all levels. An upcoming discussion is the possible revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in higher education. Opinions on how this should be done differ greatly between the different stakeholders, from making them more general, to elaborating the existing standards and guidelines, to expanding the standards and guidelines and lastly to strengthening the guidelines.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

»Quality Assurance (QA) is an ongoing process that ensures the delivery of agreed standards. These agreed standards should make sure every educational institution, of which the quality is assured, has the potential ability to achieve a high quality of content. [QA] must not to be confused with accreditation. The goal of [QA] is to improve education and therefore it should take place on all levels (course, programme, and institution and its sub-divisions) and be a continuous process« (ESU 2003:3).

QA in higher education has been part of the Bologna Process since 1999 declaration, in which ministers called for the *»promotion of European co-operation in [QA] with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies«* is among the action lines which *»[ministers] consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide«* (1999:6). From these few lines in the Bologna Declaration, QA has now come to be part of whole chapters in more recent communiqués.

4.2 OVERVIEW

DEVELOPMENTS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE BEFORE THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The history of QA in higher education on a European level began years before the Bologna Process. The European Commission started the ›European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education‹ in 1994. The aim of the project was to develop an evaluation culture within higher education in the seventeen countries involved. The countries were the then fifteen Member States of the EU, along with

Norway and Iceland. The focus was on teaching and learning in engineering sciences and communication/information sciences or art/design. The pilot project did not encompass other disciplines, nor the institutional level of higher education in general. The aim of the project was to develop a European dimension of evaluation. There was European collaboration during the project and most countries reported benefitting from the experiences of the other participating countries (Thune and Staropoli 1997).

The Institutional Evaluation Programme was launched in 1993 by CRE (now European University Association). The aim of the programme was to offer external evaluation mainly to EUA member institutions. This evaluation was specifically focused on assessing how institutions deliver on their mission, taking into account the environment in which they operate. The evaluation has been centred around the issues of what the institution is trying to do, how its doing it, how the institution knows it works and how the it makes changes, in order to improve. Essentially the main purpose is the improvement of the internal quality of the institution (Hofmann 2005).

The Council of the EU and the European Parliament made the recommendation 98/561/EC on European cooperation in QA in higher education, in 1998. This, in 1998 Member States set up transparent QA systems in all higher education institutions and that the QA should be based on common principles. These included; autonomy and independence of the bodies responsible for QA, adaptation of QA procedures and methods while respecting the autonomy of the higher education institutions, use of internal and/or external QA, involvement of the parties concerned and publication of the results of QA. Among the recommendations was that special attention should be given to the exchange of experience and cooperation in the field of QA with other Member States, as well as international organisations and associations. Cooperation and networking between the authorities responsible for QA in higher education should be promoted. The recommendation also stressed that the Commission, in close cooperation with the Member States, should encourage this cooperation and networking (EU 1998).

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, now the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) was set up in 2000, following the above cited recommendation from the Council of the EU from 1998 and the Bologna Declaration from 1999 (ENQA 2010).

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Over recent years there has generally been a lot of progress and development on QA and its European dimension, within the framework of the Bologna Process, and, judging from the collection of communiqués over time, the attention given to QA from the side of ministers and stakeholders has grown.

In Prague in 2001, the ministers stated that QA is important in guaranteeing high quality and in increasing the comparability of degrees. They called for cooperation between recognition networks and

QA networks and stated that higher education institutions and ENQA should set up a framework to share best practice.

In Berlin in 2003, the ministers stressed that mutually shared criteria and methodologies on QA on and institutional, national and European level should be developed. The E4 Group, consisting of ESIB (now ESU), European University Association (EUA), ENQA and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) were assigned with the task of developing develop standards, procedures and guidelines for QA.

These standards, procedures and guidelines entitled the ›European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education‹ (ESGs) were adopted in Bergen in 2005. The ESGs mainly refer to the quality of education within higher education institutions and the processes of quality on the three levels: internal QA, external QA and the external QA of QA agencies. The European standards for internal QA within higher education institutions do not define quality standards, but policy and procedures for QA (ENQA 2005).

The Bergen Communiqué also recommended the setting-up of a European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), that was to further promote the European dimension by listing trustworthy agencies to enhance cross-border evaluations in Europe. The ministers also called for progress to be made in student participation and international cooperation in QA.

In London, in 2007, the ministers encouraged the E4 Group to continue to co-organise European Quality Assurance fora on an annual basis. The communiqué also welcomed the setting up of EQAR by the initiative of the E4 group, stated that ESGs should be properly implemented and said that there should be more international cooperation between QA agencies (Communiqué 2007).

EQAR was founded by the E4 group and began operating in 2008. The purpose of EQAR was to increase transparency in QA in higher education across Europe, by publishing and managing a register of QA agencies in Europe that comply with the ESGs. Through EQAR, trust between higher education institutions and between QA agencies was to be fostered, with benefits for student mobility (EQAR 2010). The setting up of EQAR was also to open up opportunities for agencies to conduct reviews all over Europe, as it was the case that in some countries the institutions or study programmes could only be reviewed by national agencies.

In the 2009 Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, QA does not have a special chapter. It is however cited in several chapters, stating that teaching quality should be improved through implementation of the ESGs, transnational education should be in line with the ESGs as well as the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision of Cross-Border Education from 2005, transparency tools should be developed and be in line with the principles of QA and recognition and the E4 Group should continue its cooperation in the European dimension of QA and ensure that EQAR is reviewed externally.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué touched on transnational education. Prior to this, transnational education had been given attention through the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the following documents.

The UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision of Cross-Border Higher Education as referred to in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, were developed in 2005, to encompass the growth in cross-border higher education. The guidelines stress mutual trust and recognition between countries involved in cross-border higher education (OECD 2005).

The Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications was adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, at its second meeting in Riga on June 6th 2001. The aim of the recommendation was to foster the recognition of foreign qualifications and to underline the right of individuals holding foreign qualifications to have their qualifications assessed using transparent, coherent and reliable procedures and criteria (Council of Europe 2002).

Another document relevant to transnational education is the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, which was revised in 2007. The first version was adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its second meeting in Riga, on 6 June 2001. The objective of the code of good practice was to promote good practice in the area of transnational education, particularly with regard to quality provision of study programmes and the standards of qualifications from the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe/UNESCO 2007).

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

All in all, there has been notable change at the European level, through the adoption of the ESGs and the setting up of EQAR. However, results from *Bologna With Student Eyes* published in 2005, 2007 and 2009 show that there is still leave considerable room for improvement, both at a national and an institutional level. The publications also show that even if student involvement is in place formally, it does not necessarily mean that there is active and genuine student involvement.

The main conclusion from *Bologna With Student Eyes* 2005 is that in internal QA, students were generally asked about their opinions, but the thoroughness of the student involvement was very different and that often it did not lead to concrete changes (ESU 2005). Only in a few countries were the students involved in QA at all levels and these were exclusively Nordic countries. National students' unions also reported that there should be more of a focus on setting up QA systems at all levels, using transparent procedures, publishing results, allocating more resources to external reviews and more public justification in QA to build trust (ibid).

Two years later, the national unions again reported that students were still not fully involved in QA at all levels, in all processes and that there was a big gap to fill. Internal QA mechanisms were reported to not have been set up in all institutions and the responsibility for this was usually left to the institutions. When confronted with the development since the Bergen Communiqué, national unions stated that the ESGs have been an important step, but they also expressed their fear that programme-level external QA will be replaced by institutional level external QA: *»[National students' unions] are primarily concerned that from the students' point of view, the quality of single study programmes is much more crucial than the quality of the institution as a whole.«* (ESU 2007:16). Finally, students were confident that setting up EQAR (as welcomed in the London Communiqué (2007)) would be a good step in increasing trust and transparency in QA.

Bologna With Student Eyes (ESU 2009) concluded that there was an apparent correlation between proper implementation of the ESGs and a high level of student participation in QA. In line with this, the national students' unions report that they, in general have a good level of knowledge and awareness of the ESGs. Some national unions have full support with the implementation of the ESGs at a national and institutional level, whilst others have a ›general‹ level and by no means full support for the implementation, due to weaknesses in the ESGs. In the eyes of the national students' unions there is a need to apply the ESGs at the national level, or to formulate national standards and guidelines which are compatible with the ESGs, as twenty-five percent of respondents to *Bologna With Student Eyes* (ibid) stated that national authorities were still not applying the ESGs. It seems that the institutional level was touched even less; forty-seven percent of respondents said that higher education institutions do not apply the ESGs.

THE DEVELOPMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE FROM THE BOLOGNA PROCESS STOCKTAKING REPORTS

The official Bologna stocktaking reports reflect the student perspective explained above. The 2005 stocktaking report showed that almost all countries had a QA system in place, or were progressing in setting one up. Student participation however is the element most often missing from the recommendations of a QA system, as described in the Berlin Communiqué.

In 2007, the stocktaking report indicated that almost all countries had a QA system in place, matching the Berlin Communiqué objectives for higher education in most countries. Some progress was made regarding student participation, in many countries. The level of international participation and cooperation in QA had also improved.

The 2009 stocktaking report showed that all countries had introduced QA agencies, but many had failed to set a date for the assessment of these (Rauhvargers 2009). The same report revealed that there was still a need for students be more involved in QA—not merely as observers in reviews, but also involved in institutional self-evaluations as well as in follow up procedures. International participation

in QA has decreased in the stocktaking from 2007 to 2009, but this is due to the introduction of an increased demand apart from solely having international representation in expert panels, namely being part of an international network of QA agencies. The rise in demands has made it more difficult for countries to fulfill the criteria and therefore it looks as through there has been a decrease in the development. It should also be noted that EQAR had not yet been an indicator, as the number of agencies in EQAR was far too small (only nine agencies at the time of the stocktaking).

THE DEVELOPMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE SEEN FROM THE SIDE OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

From the side of the higher education institutions, there are some interesting trends to follow. EUA's Trends III report from 2003 showed that the main challenge in the European dimension of QA was the need to increase transparency, set common criteria and have mutual recognition, without main-streaming institutions across Europe. Trends IV (2005) stated that there was a clear correlation between success in improving quality in institutions and the degree of institutional autonomy (Reichert and Tauch).

Further, Trends V (2007) found a strong correlation between the higher education institutions conducting regular reviews of their study programmes and their location in countries with a strong operational QA system. Student learning services, such as libraries and advice were not being evaluated everywhere, even though they are cited within the ESGs. Fewer institutions look into these, as part of their QA systems and in some contexts, the services in themselves are very new and are therefore not yet a part of the internal QA mechanisms (Crosier 2007).

Colin Tück, ESIB alumnus and current director of EQAR says that »*the ESGs have contributed to the creation of a quality culture at institutional level, especially where ESG Part I has been properly incorporated in national criteria and standards by QA agencies and where external QA arrangements took the ESGs' core idea seriously: That higher education institutions bear the main responsibility for quality of their programmes.*« (ESU 2010a).

THE PROGRESS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AS MEASURED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Following on from developments following the adoption of the 1998 recommendation of the Council of EU, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU made a Recommendation 2006/143/EC (15.02.2006) on further European cooperation in QA in higher education. The recommendations included are that the Member States should encourage the development of internal QA systems in higher education institutions and encourage QA agencies to be independent, apply features of QA as laid down in the 1998 recommendation and apply the ESGs. The Member States should also support the setting up

of EQAR, enable the higher education institutions to choose between different agencies in EQAR, allow for higher education institutions to get complementary assessments from agencies in EQAR, promote cooperation between agencies and ensure public access to assessments made by agencies in EQAR. It was recommended that the European Commission continue its support for cooperation between higher education institutions, QA agencies and other bodies involved in QA and to present triennial reports on the progress of the development of QA systems in various Member States, as well as the objectives set in the recommendation.

The first of the triennial reports was published in 2009. The European Commission's Progress Report on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2009) looked at the status of QA in Europe. This was a report published separately from the Bologna Process, following on the recommendations set in 2006 by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. One concern raised here was the lack of a coherent European Dimension of QA. It was not been clear what being accredited in one country means for a higher education institution or a study programme in another country. Indeed, higher education institutions need sufficient autonomy to apply for external reviews from foreign QA agencies. It was recommended that the QA agencies should be allowed to and be willing to operate beyond their national borders and QA agencies from other countries should be acknowledged and recognised by national governments and QA agencies. The report also presents the observation that there are a high number of QA agencies and that many of them are limited in size, pointing to the solution of mergers between agencies (European Commission 2009).

fig. 7—Initiatives of European Cooperation in Quality Assurance have increased throughout the Bologna Process

Initiative	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09
Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
European Commission Pilot Project		■	■														
EU Council Recommendation						■								■			
Bologna Process Communiqués							■		■		■		■		■		■
ENQA								■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
European Standards and Guidelines													■	■	■	■	■
European Quality Assurance Fora														■	■	■	■
European Quality Assurance Register																■	■
European Commission Progress Report																	■
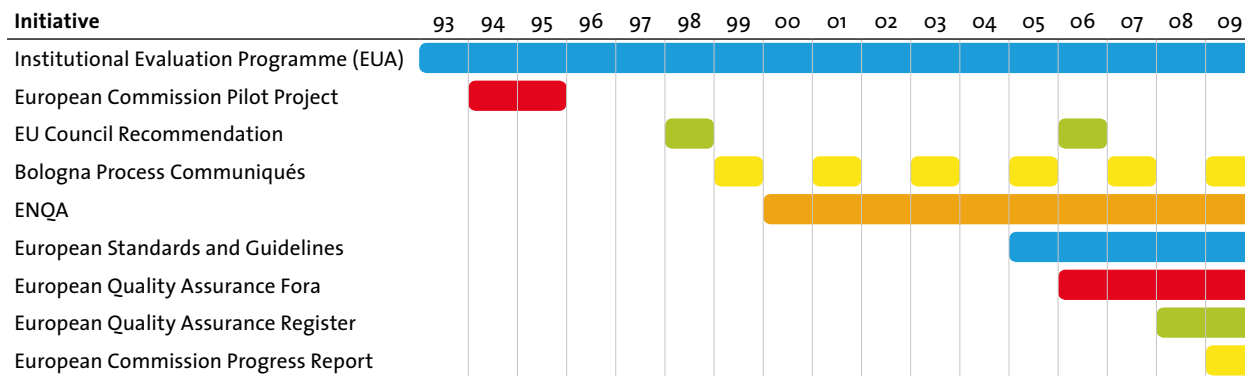
4.3   CONSIDERATION FOR THE FUTURE

As seen in the overview, the developments in the QA arena are driven by a number of actors with obviously different goals. It is clear that the robustness of the ESGs are in question at this point in time. As argued above, there are different opinions on how the ESGs should be developed into a more applicable format and the consultation with practitioners and experts on the ground will show what will be most useful in this regard.

The European Commission's Progress Report on Quality Assurance in 2009 proposed that the ESGs should encompass priorities such as the twenty-percent by 2020-target for mobility, as set in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009) and targets on employability, and through this become a tool for the implementation of the Bologna Process (European Commission 2009). The report also mentions the possibility of including quality standards on student support services, career and employment guidance and the implementation of the European Charter for Research and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (ibid).

Other stakeholders state that there are shortcomings in the ESGs in their present form: *»The future challenges is to keep generic standards and guidelines for quality and at the same time allow for other fields where measuring quality is important. There is no mention in the European Standards and Guidelines of research. The mission of the higher education institution is teaching, research and service to the community—how do you measure this? There are lackings and short-comings, but if we want them to remain truly European and cross-border then they have to be generic,«* said Stefan Delplace from EURASHE (ESU 2010b). In the *Bologna With Student Eyes* (ESU 2009), the national students' unions reported weaknesses in the ESGs that need to be overcome before they can state that they fully support the implementation as pointed out in the overview (ESU 2010b).

Lesley Wilson, from EUA commented that *»the ESGs are an important framework for quality in European higher education. Part I that applies to institutions can play an important role in framing internal quality processes that must be adapted to specific activities and promote creativity and innovation in teaching, learning and research. External quality assurance should also be improvement oriented rather than just about ticking boxes or creating a culture where institutions strive to strictly comply with external requirements«* (ESU 2010c).

On one hand, the ESGs have to be generic and as they stand today they do not provide benchmarks or concrete standards regarding quality in education. On the other hand, both the European Commission, EURASHE and the national students' unions stress the point that the ESGs do not encompass neither the entire missions, or all essential areas of issue within the higher education institutions. There can be a dilemma between setting generic guidelines to underline the development of a quality culture and turn-

ing the ESGs into a tool for the implementation of other very specific lines of action, like mobility and employability.

Using the ESGs as a tool to further implement other parts of the Bologna Process raises issues between countries that are in different stages of implementation. When asked about the future challenges of the Bologna Process, ESIB alumnus Predrag Lazetic said that, *»the key challenge is to keep up the political interest of North-West countries in the process and in the same foster reforms in countries which are behind in terms of implementation.«* (ESU 2010d). However, in order to achieve overall quality and equal and fair opportunities for students in the European Higher Education Area, it seems crucial for some necessary characteristics of higher education institutions to be assessed within QA procedures—for instance student support services.

Student involvement in QA processes needs to be fully in place, at all levels. The involvement must be both active and genuine. Firstly, student involvement requires students to take an active part in QA processes on the institutional level. Secondly, the input from students should have a direct affect on both the organisation of the study programmes and the functioning of higher education institutions in general.

The use of questionnaires for students is also essential in internal QA processes. Through the questionnaires, the students should have the opportunity to contribute with their personal experiences and provide assessments of the elements of the study programmes relevant to them. Relevant answers require that the questionnaires include relevant questions, so the design of the questionnaire should always be fit for purpose and suited for the given context. Students need to be able to trust that their answers are being used and to see concrete results, otherwise there is a risk that they will lose trust and interest in providing feedback. *Bologna With Student Eyes* (2005) stated that *»there is a great variety in the comprehensiveness of student evaluations, the levels within the higher education institution they are undertaken, whether the results lead to improvements or if they just end up in a forgotten desk drawer.«* (ESU 2005:27). This is still highly relevant today and should be a consideration for the future.

ESU believes that external QA at institutional level and external QA at programme level are complementary to each other and that the programme level is particularly critical for the students. In the case where there is a shift from one to another, the focus should remain on securing the development of a sound quality culture at institutional level and the debate and consultation should involve all students and other stakeholders.

4.4   CONCLUSIONS

Student participation remains essential in creating a quality culture in higher education institutions and in reaching commonly stated quality policy goals. It is very important that students are truly equal partners at all levels of QA. Students must not merely act as observers or be kept out of informal decision-

making arenas. Within the Bologna Process, quality of education has not been defined, nor have levels of quality—but the need for the implementation and concrete use of QA procedures have been put on the agenda. Student assessment of courses and teaching staff is very important for the quality of education in the eyes of the students. Through QA, the students should have a direct influence on the quality of their education.

The ESGs need to be fit for purpose and many stakeholders are pushing for an inspection in the near future. There is a dilemma between keeping generic guidelines fit for all national contexts, and avoiding fostering a culture of ticking boxes and encompassing other fields of action. The different opinions on how the ESGs should be developed into a more applicable format and the consultation with practitioners and experts on the ground will show what will be most useful in this regard.

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5 GOVERNANCE AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION

All countries taking part in the Bologna Process allow for students to organise some form of representation and become a part of the higher education setting. Sadly, this is as far as the similarities go.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Student participation in higher education governance has a long history and strong traditions. Students are believed to have played a large role in founding the University of Bologna in medieval times (Università di Bologna 2010). Closer to the present day, one of the aims of the 1968 student protests was to increase student participation in higher education governance. Despite these historical examples, student participation in governance has still not been fully assured in Europe.

In the original Bologna Declaration (1999), no mention was made of student participation. It was in the Prague Communiqué (2001) that student participation was first mentioned as a part of the Bologna Process and the Ministers agreed that: *»students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions«* (Communiqué 2001:3). Perhaps even more importantly the communiqué stated that *»students are full members of the higher education community«* (Communiqué 2001:1).

Since 2001, the importance of student participation has been reaffirmed in most official Bologna documents. The Berlin Communiqué (2003) goes further than its Czech predecessor, with Ministers proclaiming that: *»Students are full partners in higher education governance«* (2003:5). Clearly the identification of students as ›full partners‹ was a step forward for student participation. Not only were students now considered members of the community, influencing organisation and content, they were also seen to be partners in the governance of that same community. In addition, the Berlin Communiqué (2003) stressed that student participation should be active, not just symbolic—an important recognition of a wider issue. Even so, another stumbling block was overlooked when Ministers claimed that legally, all requirements were in place for such full student participation. This was not the case.

5.2 OVERVIEW

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

In 2003, the same year the Berlin Communiqué was issued, the first *Bologna With Student Eyes* (BWSE) report was published by ESU (ESU 2003). The first bi-annual report portrayed a very different picture

from that in the Berlin Communiqué. Whilst it is true that most countries already had some legal measures covering student representation, within higher education institutions (HEIs) at a local level, a large number of national unions reported that representation was highly insufficient (ESU 2003).

In addition, the levels of involvement in different countries substantially varied. In many places, students were still not acknowledged as full partners, with some students' unions even reporting that, since the signing of the Bologna Declaration, students' rights to participate in decision-making had been diminished due to new legislation, which adapted the governance of HEI to a more corporate model (ESU 2003).

Of course, there were positive examples of increased student participation in the early years of the Bologna Process. In some countries, new legislation geared at increasing student participation was introduced. The fact that students were included in the decision-making process itself led to an increased involvement with other issues. It is also true that before the Prague Communiqué made it a part of the Bologna Process, many countries already had measures in place to ensure student participation and did not feel a need to make drastic changes to their participatory systems (ESU 2003).

Whilst Ministers officially proclaimed students as full partners, one of the significant problems that arose in the field of student participation was the emerging view of students as consumers, rather than as equal members of the higher education environment. This attitude has been gaining ground in recent years, with students' unions reporting a higher incidence of students being deemed as consumers in 2005, in spite of the declaration made in Berlin two years earlier. Although a relatively new concept in public higher education, this view of students as consumers was found to be the norm within the private sector (ESU 2005).

The communiqués following Berlin were rather ambiguous about the role of students in higher education governance. In 2005, despite an initial emphasis on student participation with its importance cited near the beginning of the Bergen Communiqué, no concrete measures were included (Communiqué 2005).

Two years later, the London Communiqué did not mention student participation at all (Communiqué 2007). This can be taken to mean either that in the eyes of the ministers student participation was no longer a problem, or that student participation was no longer deemed a priority. If ministers believed the former to be the case, the BWSE report of 2007 demonstrated the opposite, with national unions reporting that *»[t]here seems to be no real improvement of the overall situation regarding student participation [in higher education governance] since 2005«* (ESU 2007:23). In fact, the 2007 publication mentioned setbacks in some countries and stagnation in others; there was little progress for the report to highlight. In the Leuven Communiqué of 2009, there was some increased reference to the importance of student participation, with the communiqué stating that the reforms being carried out would require full participation of students and staff (Communiqué 2009).

STUDENT PARTICIPATION TODAY

As mentioned previously, the most commonly discussed problem with student participation within countries taking part in the Bologna Process is the increasingly prevalent view that students are consumers, rather than active and equal members of the community. By looking at students in this way, universities fail in their role of creating active, democratic citizens. Regrettably, this view of students as consumers appears to be gaining traction. A part of this trend is a decrease in student participation, as attempts are made to create more efficient governance.

The conversion of students to consumers is not the stated aim of the Bologna Process, but it is nevertheless a trend reported by many unions in the BAFL questionnaire. The national union of students in Denmark DSF said student participation *»is not ensured to any satisfying degree«* (ESU 2010a) and that this is the result of the University Act passed in 2003, reducing both the influence of students and staff in the university boards. In the context of the Prague Communiqué, which incorporated student participation into the Bologna Process in 2001, this Act must be considered a significant setback.

From Switzerland, the national students' union VSS-UNES-USU, stated that the Bologna Process *»makes participation close to impossible due to the inflexibility and school-like structures«* (ESU 2010b).

The Bulgarian student union NASC reported that, in some universities, student councils are set up merely for institutions to keep their accreditation and be in compliance with the law, without actually involving students in decision-making (ESU 2010c).

Despite these serious problems, it is necessary to emphasise that in some places the Bologna Process is perceived to have had a positive impact on higher education. In fact, even though the Bulgarian NASC reports some student councils as *pro forma* only, they also point out that they see the inclusion of students in the Bologna Process as having led to increased possibilities for student representation (ibid).

Whilst generally, there is almost always a legal reference to a minimum level of student representation within HEI decision-making bodies, this is not always the case. For example VSS-UNES-USU reports that such regulation is limited to universities and does not apply to other HEI institutions. They also point out that students are mainly present in advisory bodies, not governing ones.

A similar situation was reported in Austria, where, until the recent pomulgation of a new legislative act, students in universities of applied sciences were not represented. The Austrian student union ÖH nonetheless commented that much more needs to be done for representation to become active at all levels in these universities, and a lack of any real participation in teachers colleges was also reported (ESU 2010a).

The examples above have not been selected because they are unique, but because they are representative of the situation in many European countries. The Bologna Process has not increased student participation to a large extent in Europe as a whole. Many of the national unions which reported problems in

the first BWSE are still facing similar difficulties seven years later (ESU 2003). Of course, there are some countries where the Bologna Process is seen as a force for the better, when it comes to student participation. This is especially true for the countries that started out with the weakest traditions on the subject, before entering the process. However, this is not at all an overall trend.

The percentage of students taking part in governing bodies varies greatly throughout and within the Bologna countries, ranging from ten, to thirty-three percent, most often falling between fifteen and twenty percent (ESU 2010a). Figures vary greatly even between institutions within a country, or different bodies in the same institutions. The French student union FAGE reports that the 2007 laws on university governance »provide that the university boards can have from twenty to thirty-one members, of which three to five will be students representatives,« meaning that the amount of student representation can range from ten, to twenty-five percent between institutions, which decide on this autonomously.

fig. 8—Percentage of students in HEI decisional bodies
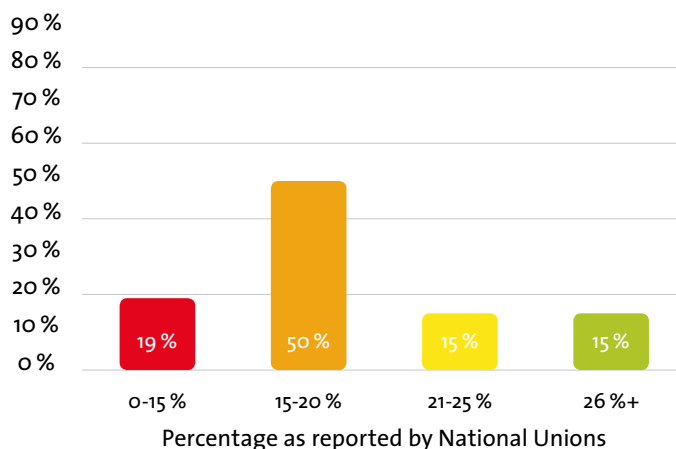
Belgium's Flemish student union, VVS, points out that even though there is a decree in place which ensures the existence of student unions, that same decree allows the HEIs themselves to decide the role of those unions. They can choose between using a co-decision procedure, in which students get at least ten percent of the votes on the board of the institution, or a consultative model, where there are student councils that have no votes in decision making bodies, but which can only participate in advisory bodies (ESU 2010a).

5.3 CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

As the ministerial communiqués have rightly pointed out, student participation is a vital part of the process of creating an European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Students need to be partners in the higher education arena and cannot be marginalised as users of education. Viewing education as a commodity and students as its consumers in a market-driven environment, leads to the devaluation of education as a major factor for societal development and is a large step backward for Europe.

Most national unions, when asked about the future, doubt that the Bologna Process will safeguard the status of students within higher education governance. This has also been revealed in the *Bologna With Student Eyes* questionnaires in which very few unions have reported the Bologna Process actually making a positive impact on student representation.

fig. 9—Percentage of National Unions reporting the Bologna Process having a positive impact on student representation
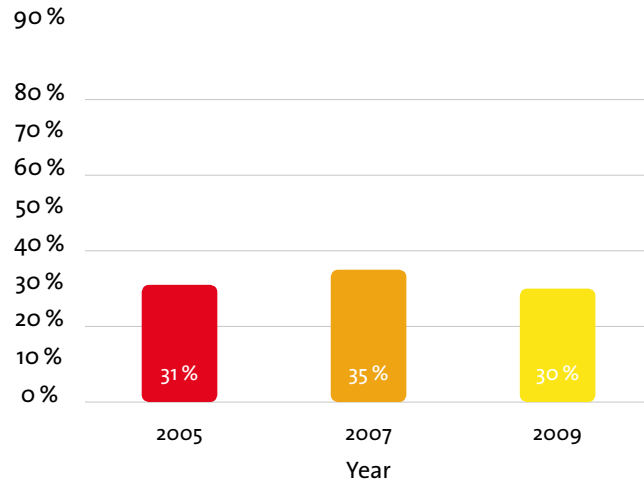
The national unions believe that the commodification of education and the decreasing democracy in higher education environments will continue to the detriment of the traditional role universities play in educating students, not only for participation in the job market, but as active participants in democratic societies.

This development is not caused by the policies of the Bologna Process, but is rather due to influence from other agendas. This is a view supported by ESU alumni Koen Geven who points out that: *»The Bologna process has been a practice of leading by example, thus integrating students at the highest levels. We have a strong voice in the Bologna process and we are recognised as a key stakeholder. ... But a push from*

other agendas from such as the Lisbon strategy is moving the development in the direction of a more New Public Management style of governance. This can be seen as almost a ›Caesarian‹ enterprise with a dictator on top, hindering access for stakeholders. Currently we have two competing models of governance and I cannot say that the Bologna process model is winning. The Bologna process style of governance is positive, but increasingly on the defence in the reforms of higher education institutions« (ESU 2010b).

If there is to be any hope of reaching the goals of the Bologna Process and creating an ambitious higher education area in Europe, these trends must clearly be stopped. European ministers for higher education must make a greater commitment to student participation in governance and take responsibility in ensuring that students' rights to participation are safeguarded, for the sake of the whole European higher education environment. Complementing this, higher education institutions must create an environment which fosters democracy and involves students at all levels.

If a true European Higher Education Area is to exist, more concrete steps, including legal guarantees by governments, as well as measures taken by at the institutional level are needed to achieve a fully active student presence within the EHEA.

5.4   CONCLUSIONS

All countries taking part in the Bologna Process allow for students to organise some form of representation and become a part of the higher education setting. Sadly, this is as far as the similarities go. In some countries, students are active partners in all decision-making processes. In others, students only have nominal representation, at a minimal number of institutional levels. The HEIs in certain countries can even determine the level of student participation autonomously, even though national law places certain requirements upon them.

While all ministerial communiqués since Prague (with the exception of the one made in London), have stated the importance of student participation, little has been done to make it a reality. Students have, of course, been active at the in the Bologna Process itself and it must be noted that ESU is quite satisfied with the level of student participation in decision-making at that level. However, in the EHEA, whilst participation has increased in some countries, the process does not seem to have had a great impact on student representation overall. This is partly because, whilst student participation has been considered a principle of the Bologna Process, it has never been recognised as an action line, or been included in stocktaking exercises.

Today, student participation is increasingly under threat from a general trend toward decreasing democracy within higher education institutions. It is therefore obvious that if student participation in governance is to be ensured in the EHEA, as appears to be the will of the higher education ministers of Bologna, much more decisive measures are needed, both at governmental and institutional levels.

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6 TRANSPARENCY

Although multidimensional transparency tools officially entered into Bologna Process documents only recently in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, there has been a much longer movement towards the establishment of this action line, with it being strongly linked to the goals of attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area and internationalisation of higher education. However, there is a significant difference of opinions when it comes to defining or pinpointing such transparency in the official Bologna documents without having much coherent understanding or without due consideration for possible ramifications.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Process has always related to transparency as an underlining principle in the implementation of several tools that serve the goals of creating the EHEA and promoting mobility. Transparency as such has been mentioned as part of tools such as diploma supplement (Communiqué 2003) and later in connection with qualification frameworks (Communiqué 2007). Only in 2009, in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, was specific mentioning made of transparency tools; the call to monitor existing and developing transparency tools (Communiqué 2009). Preceding the ministerial conference, during the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, focus on creating a new and multidimensional European approach to a global rankings of higher education institutions was made.

The final wording in the communiqué stated that the principal aim of *»... current initiatives designed to develop mechanisms for providing more detailed information about higher education institutions [...]«* is *»[...] to make their (HEI) diversity more transparent [...]«* (Communiqué 2009:5). The ministers mandated the Bologna Follow-Up Group *»to monitor the development of the transparency mechanisms«* (Communiqué 2009:6). The Bologna secretariat followed up this task by an initiative to suggest setting up a separate working group on multidimensional transparency tools instead of incorporating it under the overall Bologna Process implementation working group mandate to which other monitoring and measuring was allocated to.

6.2 OVERVIEW

Transparency has been at the core of the Bologna Process because it has always been seen seen as very closely linked to making fair recognition and comparability of degrees a reality. As such, it was cited in the Berlin (2003) Communiqué, in which ministers asked *»[...] institutions and employers to make full*

use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies.« (Communiqué 2003:5). This was followed in Bergen (2005), by the ministers commanding in reference to 2010 that *»[...] 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.«* (Communiqué 2005: 5).

In London (2007) ministers affirmed that *»[...] qualifications frameworks are important instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between, higher education systems.«* (Communiqué 2007:3). Similarly in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) ministers stated that *»[...] the Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and recognition [...]«* and then with regards to life-long learning that *»[...] the accessibility, quality of provision and transparency of information shall be assured.«* (Communiqué 2009:3).

The last communiqué however saw another chapter on transparency and the tools to achieve it, referring to *»[...] 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.«* Exclusively noting the need for institutions to *»compare their respective strengths«*, but that this should *»relate closely to the principles of the Bologna Process, in particular quality assurance and recognition«* and *»be based on comparable data and adequate indicators«* (Communiqué 2009:5). In discussing this chapter, there was debate over the introduction of rankings directly into the document in the BFUG, but with several ministers and consultative members of the Bologna Process opposing this, it resulted in a paragraph that was open to wide interpretation. For some it continued to mean that rankings are durable; an example being the European Commission tendering a feasibility study on the creation of multidimensional global rankings that should be stakeholder inclusive.

For the interviews conducted for this publication, the Secretary General of the European University Association (EUA), Lesley Wilson commented that *»transparency can be many different things and the Bologna Process is addressing this issue in many different ways. [...] It is not the goal of the Bologna Process to develop classification and ranking systems.«* She continued to say that *»universities need to make clear to students, parents and to society what they are doing. Internal quality (culture) should be promoted. Interestingly, Trends 2010 show that the more autonomous institutions are, the better are they at taking responsibility for implementing quality assurance processes and being transparent«* (ESU 2010a).

Furthermore, also Stefan Delplace, The Secretary General of European Association of Institutions in Higher Education« (EURASHE) also linked these new tools to quality assurance, whilst saying that *»the stress is now on making diversity transparent for all stakeholders and that includes the students. This clear need for comprehensive cross-border information about study programmes, institutions and the relation*

with employability. The fact that it is cross-border makes it certainly a trend which you cannot stop and don't want to stop« (ESU 2010b).

The change in focus from existing tools to reach transparency to new ones such as rankings, classification, mapping and clustering thus appears to be part of another strategic goal, which has been set with the Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process (Bologna Process 2007) that is to promote European higher education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness. These new tools however are not mentioned in the strategy, but rather fit under the goals of the European Union and the Lisbon Strategy which was adopted by the European Council in 2000.

In general, it can be said that the result of the merging of the Bologna process and the Lisbon Strategy, which has been discussed ever since, is the transformation of discussions over attractiveness and the external dimension or recognition and frameworks in the Bologna Process, to a heightened focus on transparency tools. With a special highlight of rankings and classification of institutions, both, the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy share a similarity in the philosophy that the European dimension is emphasised as a special value on its own merit, which needs to be preserved and strengthened in the face of Europe's relatively decreased competitiveness in the globalised world economic system. This is despite the fact that rankings and classification however existed for some time before the emergence of either Bologna or Lisbon, starting with the United States and the Anglo-American world. It is also these higher education systems whose institutions had also gone to dominate the top of most global rankings by 2008. Indeed, this is what prompted some countries to turn the attention to different types of ranking and classification systems as a means to promote their higher education systems and to compete in excellence, especially to try to create better rankings which would emphasise European values and the diverse system that it had in higher education.

Based on the communication of the European Commission on the modernisation of universities and higher education (European Commission 2006) and the so called modernisation agenda, there has been steady financial support for performance indicator based projects on comparability of higher education institutions or programmes such as typology and mapping/classification efforts by Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), assessment of higher education learning outcomes (AHELO) in a project by OECD and assessment of university based research conducted by a separate expert group by European Union funds. From the perspective of the Commission, initiatives in the quality assurance arena such as the development of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) also fit perfectly into the trend for more transparency and performance measurement, and are cited at various points, with a recently begun university data collection exercise, under the auspices of the Directorate General on Research.

In general, an understanding has developed which was also strongly referenced by the Commission tender and the outcomes of the conference held by the French Presidency that one-dimensional global

rankings should be denounced as providers of non-neutral information. Such rankings would include the famous Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) and the Academic Ranking of World Class Universities by the Institute of Higher Education of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, both of which promote a one fits all purpose, by emphasising research or reputation. The earlier mentioned university data collection project that should serve as an important transparency tool still has a special focus on universities that are research oriented, though this seems to be natural considering that it is developed under the DG research. In this regard it should be noted that there is a general agreement that there is not enough comparable and measureable data available besides research performance and that most new initiatives are also weak on this.

Jürgen Kohler, who prepared a paper for the UNESCO preparatory conference of the European region for the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education 2009, notes that the remarkable innovation in the process of developing the transparency tools in the format of classifications and rankings is that *»Europe is beginning to see institutional classification as a public responsibility not to be left just to individual operations of research institutions usually backed and highlighted by media. Europe now strives towards a system of trans-national calibration supporting true cross-border comparability«* (Kohler 2009:32). Also according to Kohler, such government led initiatives imply the need for normative data (Kohler 2009) and in this light, there is serious doubt that it will be possible to create a tool which comprises a meaningful comparison of criteria most valuable and important for students. For instance, Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung in Germany in their CHE University Ranking, that focuses on sub-institutional level deminstrated serious challenges in implementing comparable student and teacher survey based classification between different higher education systems, reaching beyond Germany (even in other German speaking countries) (Federkeil 2008).

Taking note of these developments, we can view the story of transparency tools in the Bologna Process as rather confusing and controversial. There seems to be a serious lack of common understanding of what is meant by transparency tools or even what the ministers meant by ›monitoring‹ the development of the transparency tools. Kohler defines classification as a buzz word that leaves space for interpretation, in which a minority of governments see it as rankings and majority as grouping of institutions (Kohler 2009). As mentioned above, some of the main stakeholders, followed by a significant number of countries, strongly contested the inclusion of these new tools in the Bologna Process. Yet, afterwards in the BFUG it was only the students questioning the establishment of a separate working group for the multi-dimensional transparency tools monitoring, whereas topics such as mobility and the social dimension were being disregarded by the Bologna secretariat, who were initially refusing to set up separate working groups for these, even though countries were willing to chair them.

The controversy is evident with Bastian Baumann, Secretary General of Magna Charta Observatory pointing out in the conducted interview that *»we are talking about multidimensional tools because a few*

countries have their own agenda and are taking initiatives that are not directly linked with the Bologna Process. It was accepted in the communiqué as the only initiative that has not been preceded by a Bologna seminar. They say it is to provide information and transparency, but it is of course a hidden agenda linked to funding and making levels of HEIs. This will lead to a lot of problems; most notably—social access and equity.« (ESU 2010c). Further, Koen Geven, former ESU Chairperson points to questions of interpretation by stating that *»currently the discussion is not about transparency, but about rankings. If transparency means information to students, then maybe they are more interested in social factors? Housing, attention to the social aspect and the student culture are topics that potential students are more interested in. This is usually qualitative information that cannot be ranked.«* (ESU 2010d). Indeed, there is a link between countries standing strong on the issue of transparency tools, for example; France, The Netherlands and French-speaking Belgium amongst others (and who also belong to the group that defines it as rankings) and the influence of these governments over the Bologna Secretariat given that the latter consists of civil servants from the ministries of some of these governments.

Behind the wider discussion, there is also a notion that it is essential for students to make informed decisions. In the 2009 Eurobarometer, commissioned by the European Commission, practically the same proportion of students agreed (74 %) that students choose where to study on the basis of other factors (such as location, friends, cost, etc.) as those who agreed (75 %) that performance rankings of institutions and programmes would help students to choose. The survey was more controversial on the issue of whether students have enough information to choose where to study where sixty-three percent agreeing that there is enough information, but a third of students who had abandoned plans to be mobile, said that lack of information was a big obstacle (Eurobarometer 2009). It is difficult to claim that students are asking for performance rankings to be created, when they are only asked about whether it would help, especially considering the perceived lack of information on one hand and the little knowledge about possible transparency tools. Furthermore, students were not asked to give a list of priorities on which information they would want to be provided nor to respond to open questions that could have given much more input to policy decisions.

There are also serious differences in national contexts and debates on quality and the transparency of it. Out of all questions in this area, there is the biggest disparity between countries: where only six percent of Finnish respondents yet fifty-four percent of Romanians strongly agreed that rankings would be helpful. This can also be seen as a major indication that the old transparency initiatives, like recognition regulations do not provide enough information, or are underused or malimplemented in some countries. Colin Tück, the Director of EQAR also noted this in the interview conducted for this publication: *»I think the debate on ›transparency tools‹ (referring to classification, multidimensional rankings and the such) definitely shows that there must be a lack of transparency of quality of higher education. Otherwise people would not be so keen on using and discussing these tools. If you don't like some proposed tools, because*

they are simplistic, built on a seemingly universal definition of quality which tend to create hierarchies even where not intended, there need to be alternatives how existing or other new tools can create more transparency of quality in higher education (e.g. how to make quality assurance reports more transparent, accessible and usable)« (ESU 2010e).

These observations can be coupled with the replies that we received from the BAFL survey answered by twenty-nine national students' unions in Europe. Unions were asked to list what information about higher education institutions and study programmes is of relevance to students in their national context. Out of all mentions, twenty-seven (more than a third) were about information on study programmes.

fig. 10—Information which is considered most relevant for students by national unions
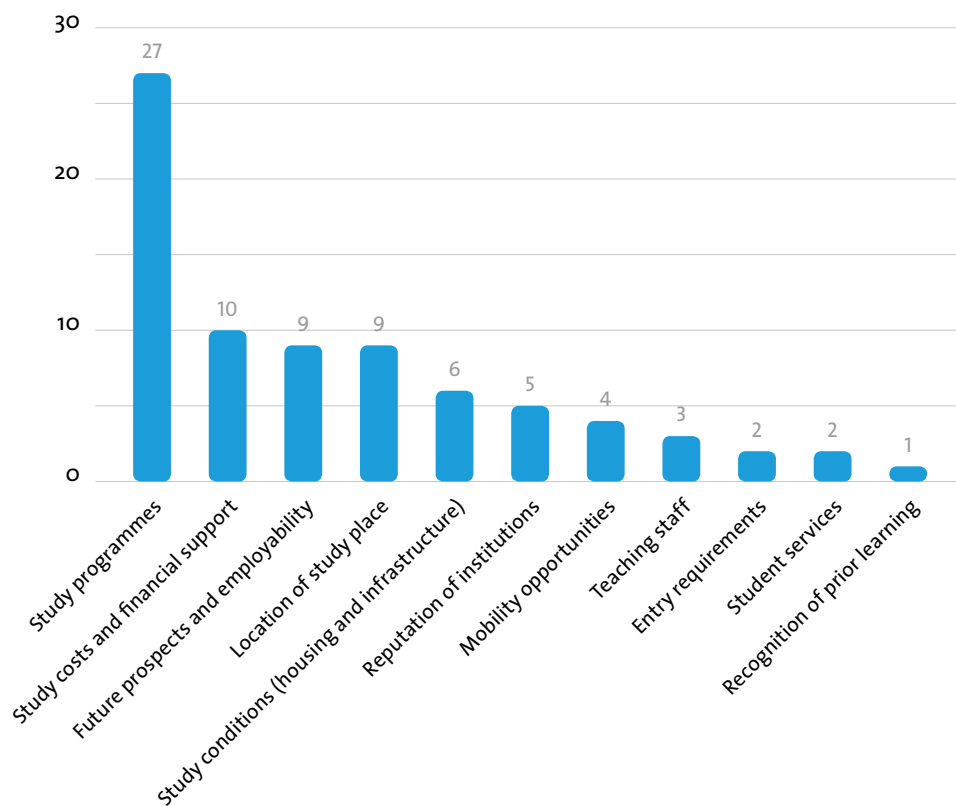
This was followed by ten statements of information on study costs and offered financial support, nine mentions on future career/study prospects and employability; another nine mentions on the location of the study place and six mentions on study conditions such as housing and institutions' infrastructure. Only after these, was reputation of institutions or programmes mentioned. Among the twenty-seven mentions of study programmes, there was a special focus on the content and the structure of the study programmes (ten mentions), quality of the programmes (nine), but also four mentions of both learning/ studying methods and learning outcomes. This data confirms that in the view of national students' unions, aggregated rankings or classifications or other transparency tools that seek to measure things are difficult to apply as most of these replies indicate the need for descriptive information which is highly dependent on the students' background.

However, there were a number of unions adding to this that there is almost none or very little research information available about what kind of information students in their respective countries need in order to make informed decisions and on what affects their choices of study the most. It can thus be acknowledged that student unions should urge their governments or rector conferences to gather this data or to try gathering it themselves.

One key focus is also on the location of the institution, as it is widely known that data in many countries shows that most students end up studying close to their parental-home, as was pointed out by NSU/ StL from Norway. This is often due to financial, but sometimes also cultural considerations that stop students from moving far from their families, if moving at all. Furthermore, data from the United Kingdom, provided by NUS UK, shows that the student body in the institutions performing well in the rankings (so-called Russell group) does not reflect socio-economic realities and that other institutions not fitting into the group accommodate in relative terms more students with lower socio-economic backgrounds (NUS UK 2009:9). They further state that *»students from backgrounds where no previous family member undertook higher education find it much more difficult to obtain proper advice and guidance«* (NUS UK 2009:5) and this includes the way rankings affect choosing. Noting this, it should be also mentioned that transparency tools thus rather target the already socially and geographically mobile students and hence these tools are beneficial to only a small minority of students, and more work is needed to lift other obstacles. Based on these reflections it is adequate to state that more research is needed in this regard to what important stakeholders such as students actually view as important information, in order to satisfy their needs and this would benefit all potential students equally. Unfortunately, the current transparency initiatives still fail to provide enough information about the social aspects such as full study costs (including hidden registration fees, housing and equipment etc.), or the quality of accommodation or services and support provided which would be extremely relevant to students with existing access barriers created by a lack of income.

6.3   CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

It is clear that the discussion over transparency has been given a more multidimensional perspective, yet still it underlines rankings and classification. The question remains; from which point do governments see the relevance of these new tools when they accepted to include them as an official action line without common understanding on how they can complement the already existing Bologna tools. There is even contradictory belief, which was also pointed out by a number of unions answering the questionnaire, that institutions tend to rather profile themselves to score highly, with the criteria that lead to good positions in various ranking and classification exercises. This might very much undermine the work on recognition, promoting diploma supplements, qualification frameworks and quality assurance for transparency to name a few. ESU believes that not enough has been done regarding the latter tools in promoting them, thus leading to fears that if another action line is created, it will inevitably take focus away from these that already have common understanding, have not been implemented to their full effect and have been within the core of transparency of the Bologna Process for a long time.

Furthermore, there is a threat to diversity and relevance of information, but also to institutions. As analysis of already existing and numerous national and international rankings show, there is actually a wide range of diversity in indicators and also different systems being used. Rankings are a weighed aggregation of indicators and although there are apparent differences between ranking systems, it turns out that there are some real and intriguing similarities among particular subsets of league tables in their outcomes which have the same top universities internationally (Usher 2008), even though there is no reason to suggest this is based on some ›super‹ indicators (ibid), though the authors do conclude there might be a strong bias towards age, size and per-student expenditure (Usher 2008). In this light, we can note the trend that there is a desire for institutionalising rankings, as one part of the steering tools for the government as also pointed out by Kohler. This is more so evident in recent calls for more efficient governance and financing systems and the promotion of excellence that incorporate performance based rankings as a reference points. This might cut down on the diversity of information as it emphasises the supremacy of an institutional model most compatible with the developed and institutionalised framework.

Finally, there is a continuous lack of knowledge over what really constitutes substantive and useful information for stakeholders such as students, especially international students. The reason for this are that there is little follow-up for already existing tools and not enough action on implementing common cycles and credit systems as well as, serious and continuous problems with recognition throughout Europe, an overall lack of knowledge about diploma supplements and other numerous examples which are evident in other chapters of this publication.

6.4   CONCLUSIONS

The most problematic issue within the context of the Bologna Process is that there is no uniform understanding of transparency tools; hence it is ultimately questionable whose interest the increased focus on the subject matter serves. Furthermore, transparency discussions are more and more linked to accountability and public spending questions, thus the impact of developing these tools is unforeseen. Serious reservations should be raised about the effect of such initiatives to institutional diversity as it might become an agenda of stratification policies.

Finally, students have indeed asked for more transparency, but this should be through meaningful provision of information. If this were to be provided through rankings, it first would be necessary to prove that all the information students need can actually be measured in a quantitative way, which is highly questionable, considering the fact that it is for instance simply impossible to measure and compare teaching or study programme quality, in a quantitative way, so that it would stay relevant to all students. Through good implementation of tools like the diploma supplement and effective quality assurance procedures, major steps in achieving more transparency would be more likely.

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7 QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

Whilst an overarching framework for qualifications for the European Higher Education Area had been set up by 2005, the creation of functioning national qualification frameworks has been generally slow, cumbersome and ineffective. The existence of both the EHEA QF and the EQF—LLL has been a problem, as, whilst the two are not incompatible, there has been much confusion at the national level.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Qualification frameworks are, within the Bologna Process, those frameworks of comparable and compatible qualifications for higher education systems, which seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. National qualification frameworks in the Bologna context are national-level frameworks, which should be ultimately compatible with the EHEA-wide overarching framework.

Qualification frameworks are not a new idea, nor an exclusively European one. Work on developing comprehensive qualification frameworks has been going on in countries such as New Zealand or South Africa since the early 1990s (SAQA 2010).

7.2 OVERVIEW

APPARITION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The idea of the creation of a European QF was floated long before its *de facto* inclusion into the Bologna Process. In Sorbonne, there was already a statement of the need *»to develop a framework for teaching and learning, which would enhance mobility and an ever closer cooperation«* (Declaration 1998:1). The Bologna Declaration itself implied this by emphasising *»the achievement of grater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education«* (Declaration 1999:2). The process ran further in search for some common or ›overarching‹ structures that could be used as ›common denominators‹, for diverse national HE systems.

In the *Conclusions and Recommendations of the Bologna Process Seminar on Bachelor-level Degrees* held in Helsinki, 16-17 February 2001, many of these ideas had been already set up:

»The promotion of mobility in Europe requires increased transparency and comparability of European higher education qualifications. In order to achieve this need some common criteria for the definition of bachelor degrees are needed. This framework should be flexible enough to allow national variations, but at

the same time clear enough to serve as a definition. These broad definitions should be achieved already in the Prague Summit of Higher Education.« (Bologna Process 2001).

The conclusions of the Helsinki conference went on to identify some ›common denominators‹ for the European bachelor degree, including the number of corresponding ECTS and the importance of the cycle for future life-long learning.

The Helsinki seminar of January 2001 was the first important step toward developing »an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA« and it left clear fingerprints in the Bologna Process:

> *»The readability and comparability of European higher education degrees worldwide should be enhanced by the development of a common framework of qualifications, as well as by coherent quality assurance and accreditation/certification mechanisms and by increased information efforts.«* (Prague Communiqué 2001:3).

The debate around the issue of qualification frameworks continued in the Berlin Communiqué, in which qualification frameworks were covered more extensively:

> *»Ministers encourage the member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.«* (Communiqué 2003:4).

Initially, progress was fast, and by 2005 an overarching framework for qualifications had been created, in advance of expected national implementation. Whilst the creation of the overarching framework won much appraisal, there was a considerable delay in implementating national qualification frameworks. The first countries to self-certify their NQFs were Ireland and Scotland, which already had a head-start of several years in elaborating such frameworks. In most countries, however, previous systems that were perceived by ministries as being national qualification frameworks were different in both scope and extent. Previous systems that had the role of modern qualification frameworks often specified that an individual would have to complete one level, in order to access the next level—from primary to secondary and from secondary to tertiary. Such existing systems may be confused with NQFs, even though the purpose of the new-type qualifications frameworks is to overcome barriers rather than to underline them (Crosier 2007:68). De facto, previously existing QF systems were in fact mostly higher education System access regulations, and did not really define qualifications and competences in a meaningful way, by focusing on achieved learning outcomes for example.

Despite the fact that in London minsters committed themselves to *»fully implementing [...] national qualifications frameworks, certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, by 2010«* (Communiqué 2007:3), setting up these frameworks is at times very problematic. The deadline was later moved to 2012, and even though most countries are working at full speed on NQF establishment— eighteen have already approved NQF proposals—at the beginning of 2010 only seven educational systems had finished the process of self-certification (Bologna Process 2010). This shows a very slow progress over the past five years, with only one in five Bologna signatories being able to meet the initial deadline. Considering that the first self-certification—the Irish one—was done in late 2006, the rate of NQF setup has been very slow.

PROBLEMS AND CURRENT OUTLOOK

While NQF proposals have already been approved in nineteen countries (Bologna stocktaking report 2009), the dismal rate of self-certification makes it one of the least-implemented Bologna action lines. It seems, at this stage, highly unlikely that full functioning NQFs across the EHEA will exist by 2012, when the new implementation benchmark has been set. Indeed, the slowdown in the process of NQF development was signalled in both the Bologna stocktaking report of 2009 (Rauhvargers 2009) and in various stakeholder publications.

The way in which NQFs have been drafted in many countries has also been problematic, with many countries not being able to create NQFs to cover all forms of education. In many cases, this is a hindrance to effectively mapping out of learning outcomes in a setting that is both conductive to life-long learning and truly outcome-based. Furthermore, it reduces the potential of qualification frameworks to be a tool in the support of personal development, by the mapping out and recognition of all educational outcomes.

EQF-LLL

The creation of the European Qualifications Framework for Life-Long Learning (EQF—LLL, or simply EQF), which was endorsed by thirty-two countries (including the European Union members), has lead to numerous problems and confusion. Whilst the two European-level qualification frameworks are compatible, as the EHEA overarching framework levels are compatible with the ones corresponding to tertiary education within the EQF—LLL, the existence of two separate European frameworks is complicating the process of NQF development and is creating much confusion for the national bodies that are meant to set them up. The 2007 Bologna stocktaking report concludes that *»the 2 parallel EQFs have resulted in some points of confusion.«* (Rauhvargers 2007).

fig. 11—Countries that have finished the NQF self-certification of compatibility with the EHEA framework.
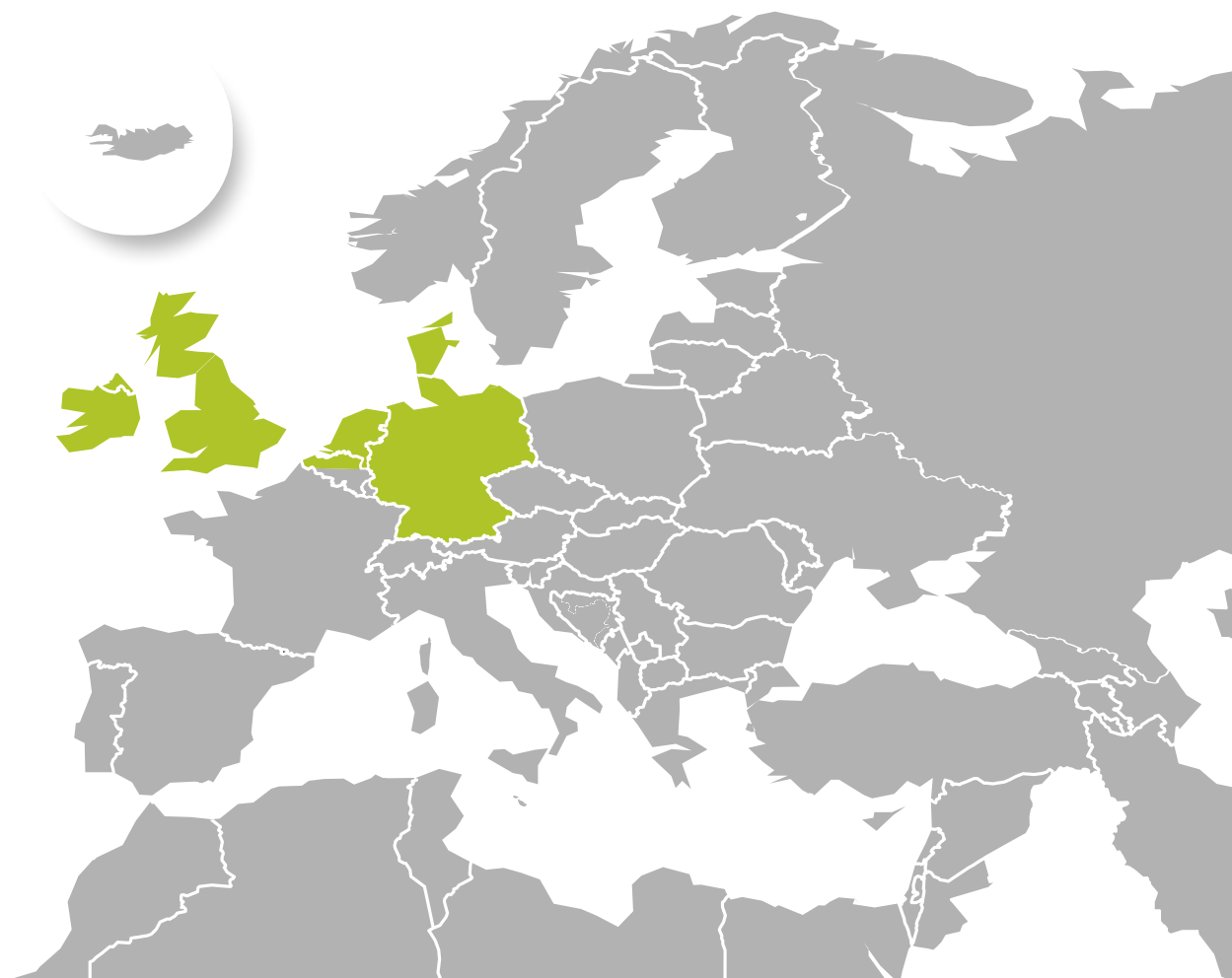
Student participation in QF development

In the context of a shift to a more student-centred form of education, student consultation and participation is vital at all levels. Ultimately, it is students who are the main beneficiaries of the creation of qualification frameworks and it is students that are using them to map out their studies. The level of student participation in the process of drafting national qualifications frameworks varies considerably across Europe, but there is significant room for improvement, with students being less often consulted than other stakeholders such as businesses, amongst others. In 2005, some twenty-two ESU member unions out of over forty were involved, to varying degrees, in the process of drafting a comprehensive NQF. In the following years, this situation stagnated, and the *Bologna With Student Eyes* from 2007 and 2009 measured no progress, but rather a slight decline (ESU 2007, ESU 2009).

fig. 12—Consultation of student unions in the creation of qualification frameworks for Higher Education
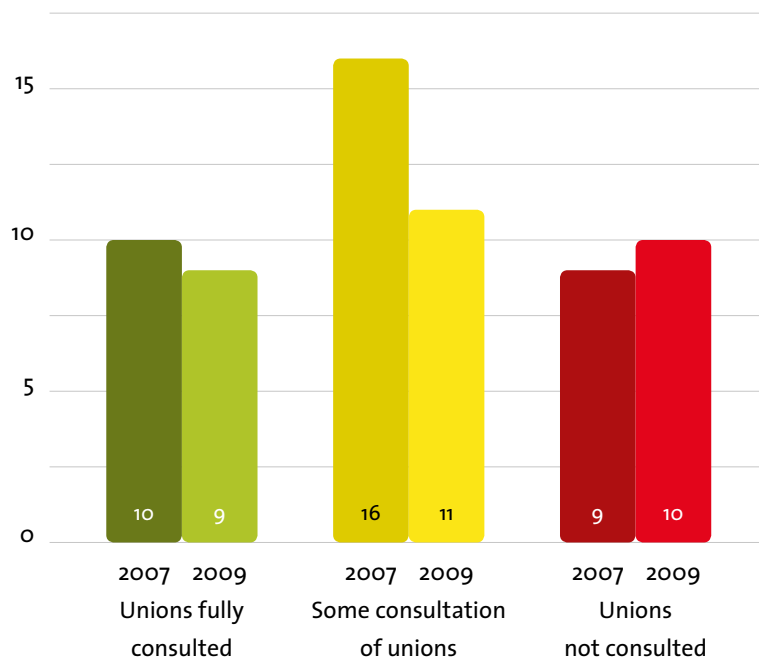
When it comes to the EQF—LLL however, student participation has been a major issue. Students are not present in the Advisory Board on EQF at European level, and also have a lesser presence at the national level. When work on creating EQF-LLL compatible national qualification frameworks was started, only students from Slovakia and Ireland report that they were consulted (ESU 2007). In 2009, only Irish students felt that they were fully consulted in the process of creating a NQF for all education (ESU 2009).

fig. 13—Involvement of student unions in work on NQF design for all education.

- Students fully consulted
- Only some consultation of students
- Students not consulted/not applicable
- Data not available
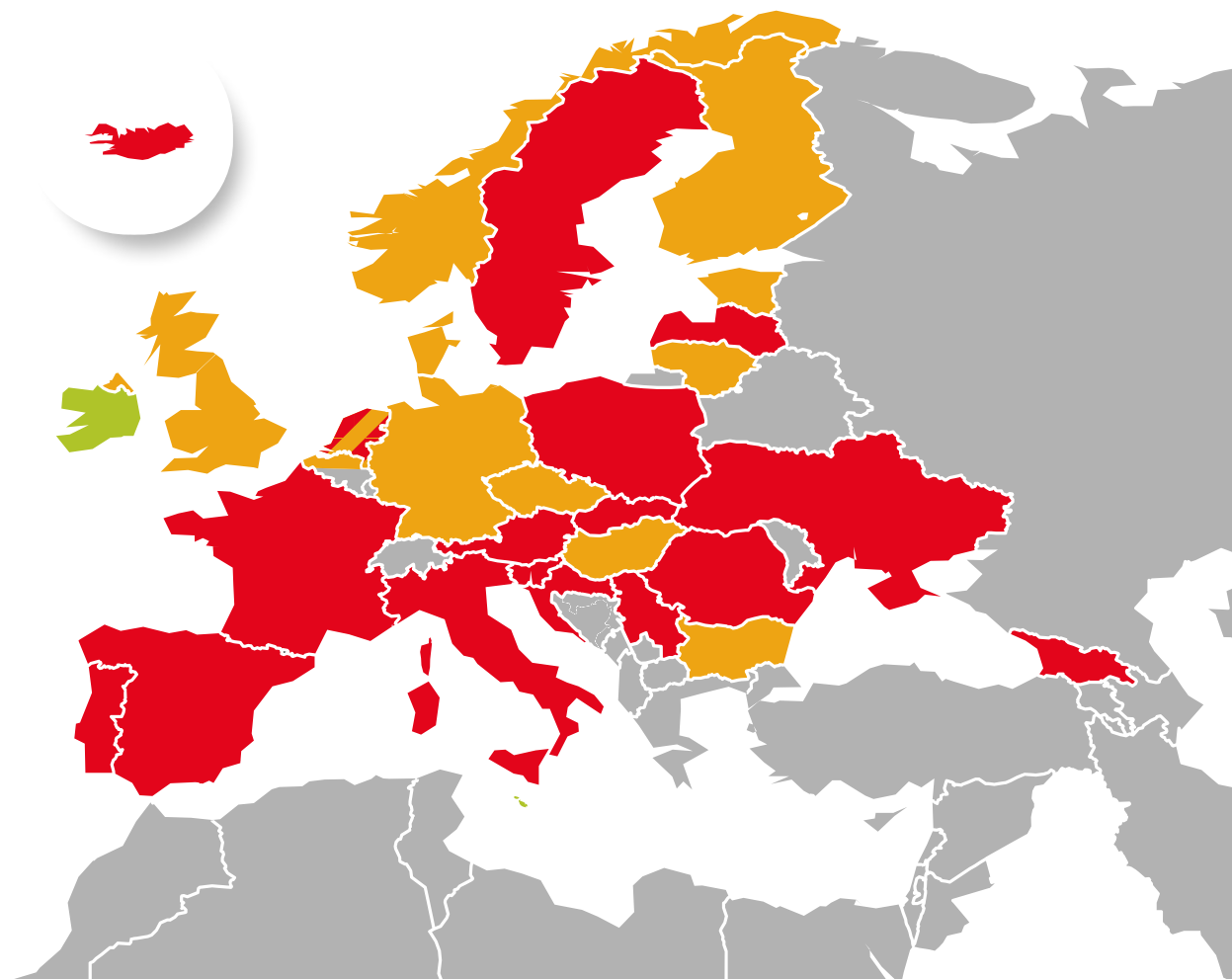
This is largely because of the specificity of the Irish qualification framework, which was created from the onset to cover all levels of education, and which had an inclusive edification process throughout all stages of development. Students in several countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, the Czech Republic and Finland were also consulted to a degree, for the implementation of a NQF mapping out all levels of formal education, though this consultation process was not fully inclusive (ESU 2009). Sometimes, student representatives are consulted on the framework levels that are specific to higher education only. However, there is still hope that this might change, as work on implementation of the EQF—LLL is still ongoing, with only one country (Malta) having conducted the referencing of their NQF for all education. Still, as of 2009, data on student consultation was rather muted (ibid).

The apparition of two overarching frameworks has created a great deal of confusion among most stakeholders involved—including students—despite their extensive compatibility. This is the reason why the perception of the level of student participation in NQF development has known significant variations within ESU's *Bologna With Student Eyes* and has not been consistent in all countries. Students from several countries felt consulted to a lesser degree in 2009 than in 2007, on the issue of QF development for higher education. Of course, progress has been identified in several cases, including in the United Kingdom, Romania, Austria and Poland.

7.3   CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

It is ESU's belief that the future state of qualification frameworks in Europe depends heavily on the national-level will to implement them properly and fully. There needs to be a full understanding in all Bologna signatory countries that qualification frameworks go far beyond previously existing frameworks, that have been regulating access between cycles or educational levels and that these need to be linked to learning outcomes and ECTS. Essentially, qualification frameworks will become truly valuable when they are used not only as a tool that ensures the compatibility and compatibility of degrees, but also as a bridge to the further development of life-long learning (LLL). This should increase the ease of access to higher education for non-traditional learners and may foster greater personal development by, creating an increased recognition of learning outcomes and their role in gaining qualifications.

ESU urges that the implementation should not be hastened, despite the already large delays, at the expense of the quality and depth of the resulting NQFs. Furthermore, the remaining work on qualifications frameworks must not be limited to discussion by a small circle of experts, but must include students and other stakeholders. This is the only way in which ownership over the QF concept can be built, and the comprehensive nature of the resulting frameworks can be guaranteed. If properly designed, these qualification frameworks have the potential of contributing to the proper implementation of almost all other Bologna action lines.

7.4   CONCLUSIONS

Overall, ESU recognises that the rapid and enthusiastic start to QF implementation has withered down, and we are witnessing ever increasing delays. Gauging national-level situations, there is great room for scepticism, even with regards to the 2012 deadline for the creation of NQFs in all EHEA countries. Whilst an overarching framework for qualifications in the future European Higher Education Area had been set up by 2005, the establishment of functioning national qualification frameworks has been generally slow, cumbersome and ineffective. The existence of both the EHEA QF and the EQF—LLL has been a problem as, whilst not incompatible, there has been much confusion at national level. Among the general traits we can identify when it comes to qualification frameworks, we can enumerate:

- The development of National Qualifications Frameworks is suffering due to the existence of numerous delays.
- The nature and usefulness of NQFs is not fully recognised by all relevant stakeholders, hence their low priority in many national contexts.
- Student participation in the development of national frameworks compatible with EQF-LLL is currently highly limited.
- Qualification frameworks, learning outcomes, ECTS and flexible learning paths are not integrated at this stage in most countries. This reduces the value of qualification frameworks and makes their functionality problematic.

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8 LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Despite the agreement by Ministers on a common working outline of life-long learning (LLL), to date, the concept of life-long learning remains still unclear and diverse. It is used indistinctively as a synonym of adult education; as part of the widening participation (WP) agenda; and as part of the upskilling of those with solid professional experience and few formal qualifications. LLL is also usedto describe continuing education for former graduates.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education policy-makers have long debated the origins of the concept of life-long learning. However, there is enough evidence to connect it to education-policy dating back to British and North American traditions in adult education, before World War II (Lazerson 1998). This evolved considerably during the gradual shift of policy interest witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s, where the role and importance of continuous, further as well as higher education was acknowledged. The 1970s also gave rise to the use of the term *recurrent education*, as promoted by the OECD referring to setting out a comprehensive educational strategy for post-compulsory education aimed at the distribution of education over the total lifespan of the individual (Mitter 2002). This established a dichotomy between life-long education and recurrent education, which can be still detected within the disputes of today.

Life-long learning was first officially mentioned within the Bologna Process in the Bologna Declaration (1999), but was then made one of the Bologna action lines in the Prague Communiqué (2001).

8.2 OVERVIEW

As aforementioned, LLL was already mentioned in Bologna, but is was only in Prague that Ministers agreed that learning is something that must be fostered throughout life. They recognised that a future EHEA must have life-long learning strategies designed to *»improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life«* (Communiqué 2001:2). Finally, they encouraged the BFUG to organise seminars on all topics, including life-long learning (ibid).

By the Bergen Ministerial conference, life-long learning and recognition of prior learning were interlinked with a bigger focus on widening participation, in order to improve the opportunities for all according to *»their aspirations and abilities«* (Communiqué 2003:6). Ministers underlined the importance of aligning national policies to make life-long learning a reality. In particular, the *»qualifications frame-*

works for the European Higher Education Area [should] encompass the wide range of flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of the ECTS credits« (ibid).

The London Communiqué integrated both concepts of life-long learning: more systematic development of flexible learning paths and improving employability in relation to each cycle and in the context of life-long learning (Communiqué 2007).

In spite of this, it was only in the Leuven Communiqué that a formal outline of the concept of life-long learning was included. Ministers agreed that *»[l]ifelong learning involves obtaining qualifications, extending knowledge and understanding, gaining new skills and competences or enriching personal growth. Life-long learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies, as well as work based routes«* (Communiqué 2009:3).

Following in the footsteps of the Berlin Communiqué (2003), Ministers in Leuven once again reiterated that life-long learning could be an effective means to widen participation within the education system. Ministers recognised that the implementation of a life-long learning strategy necessitates strong links between the stakeholders, namely public authorities, higher education institutions, students, employers as well as employees. In the 2009 Communiqué, Ministers acknowledged that attention ought to be given to learning outcomes as opposed to the different learning paths when recognising prior learning. They affirmed that a national qualifications framework is an asset in the implementation of life-long learning and agreed on striving for implementation and self-certification against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area by 2012.

Funding of life-long learning was also given its due impetus in 2009, with Ministers pledging to support life-long learning by *»[...] adequate organisational structures and funding [...]«* (Communiqué 2009:3).

Despite the agreement by Ministers on a common working outline on life-long learning, to date, the concept of life-long learning remains still unclear and diverse. It is used indistinctively as a synonym of adult education and as an educational concept rather than just education for same age cohorts, the up-skilling of those with solid professional experience and few formal qualifications as well as used to describe continuing education for former graduates. LLL is also deemed as being a synonym used as part of the widening participation agenda.

Simultaneous to the debate on LLL as an intrinsic element in the Bologna Process, in recent years, Member States of the European Union have witnessed an aggressive campaign promoting life-long learning within the European Commission's Lisbon Strategy to make Europe the most competitive region. This has lead to life-long learning being principally regarded as the means to maximise economic development and has led to the creation of a misconception that life-long learning is merely a tool for professional reconversion.

The first assessment on the situation vis-à-vis life-long learning carried out by ESU was in preparation for *Bologna With Student Eyes* (ESU 2007). Key findings in the publication highlighted that within the field of life-long learning, the ECTS-system is, as a general rule, still not being used. Member-unions in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, France, Italy and Lithuania reported that in most cases, HEIs exploit the concept of life-long learning through the creation of expensive courses that strive only to make profit. Only Sweden, Romania and Bulgaria reported a streamlined life-long learning policy within the regular education programmes, albeit at times more expensive. The financing factor featured only in the 2007 findings owing to the general comment that learners attending life-long learning courses do not enjoy the same rights as regular students, often due to having a different legal status.

In spite of the fact that the importance of LLL was recognised way back in 2001 and that in 2003 the majority of countries claimed either that they intended or were in the process of developing a life-long learning strategy (Tauch and Reichert 2003), member unions in 2009 complained that many countries had yet not drafted or implemented a policy at a national level that addresses specifically the higher education sector (ESU 2009). Fourteen unions reported that there was no such policy or that they had no knowledge of it, whilst another fourteen confirmed the existence of this policy. Many of the positive answers focused primarily on the existence of legal texts that have allowed and promoted the development of the sector. This was the case in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom, inter alia.

The abovementioned reflects also the findings in Trends V survey, in which even though sixty six percent of the institutions answered that life-long learning had a high priority or had priority along with other priorities, only seventeen percent indicated that it had a very high priority. Findings in the survey noted the development of ›junior‹ and ›senior‹ universities, where courses are designed specifically to these age groups (Crosier 2007).

Worryingly, *Trends V* reports that European higher education institutions still lack a clear conception of national qualification frameworks, with institutions being uninformed on whether or not there is a qualifications framework in their country (Crosier et.al. 2009).

8.3   CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

It is rather evident that whilst most stakeholders acknowledge the importance of life-long learning, the actions within each country are still not streamlined, which often leads to an incoherent policy on life-long learning. This can be attributed to the lack of a common understanding of what the term life-long learning should refer to. Whilst the political willingness to address the issue of life-long learning as a tool of widening participation is evident on paper, less evident is the action taken to lead to this. This scenario has led to a feeling of standstill within this field, in spite of the clear need of action that reflects the

demographic changes of the European continent. Notwithstanding, clearly life-long learning should not be is a narrow minded approach restricted solely to represent individual Governmental views, suited for the political agenda within the national context. Instead, it should be an all-encompassing educational concept, opening higher education to all generations.

Central to the debate of widening access, is the universal right to education. In this spirit, it is hoped that all citizens, irrespective of age, will be entitled to free access to education in the process of acquiring basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics as well as IT, social and foreign language skills. This will ensure that existing gaps between different socio-educational backgrounds do not increase further.

An ageing and increasingly varied student force requires a reinforcement of the social dimension of education, in addition to the creation of a high-quality learning environment, that addresses the wide range of needs of students. The creation of pre-entry and post-entry support will ensure that the completion rate, and not merely the participation rate, reflects a higher education system that caters for individuals with different social backgrounds. Amongst such support, one may also include an adequate infrastructure, which includes nursing and child support facilities that correlate with the parents' learning hours. In this respect, flexibility is also a key issue with options for part-time, distance or evening courses being attractive pathways towards qualifications that can be translated into the qualifications framework of a given education system.

Similarly to other action lines within the Bologna Process, data collection would help monitor developments in the field and could provide a clear picture of the *status quo*. As a prerequisite for successful life-long learning strategies, the recognition of prior learning must be fully available. This requires that implementation of all Bologna action lines must be pursued, with due regard being given to qualification frameworks, learning outcomes and ECTS and Diploma Supplement, alongside sound quality assurance procedures.

As highlighted by stakeholders over recent years, life-long learning needs to be mainstreamed into the mission of higher education institutions, with life-long learners no longer being segregated from mainstream students. This must be combined with principles such as widening participation and quality assurance. Further, making the learner an equal partner in decision-making should apply to life-long learning programmes in equal measure to the classical higher education provision. Whilst acknowledging life-long learning as being an asset for European Society due to an ageing population, Stephan Delplace, Secretary-General of EURASHE, when interviewed for this publication commented that life-long learning has devolved into *an economic necessity* linked to other agendas such as the Lisbon Agenda leading to a vicious circle where one can never learn enough thus forcing things upon organisations and people.

In recent years, the concept of life-long learning has been exploited as a tool to generate income. However in increasing or introducing tuition fees, students in some countries remain wary that the life-long

learning agenda will be viewed as a market or source of additional private income for the institutions in the name of Bologna. Life-long learning must be developed in the context of the public responsibility and must be regarded as a basic right, alongside the right to education in general.

The recognition of prior learning remains a concern of many students, and it must be ensured that life-long learning strategies do not reproduce social inequalities, especially by charging students for achieving credits through recognition of prior learning gained in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. Instead there must be recognition of prior learning from a range of settings, and there should be the provision of appropriate and empowering information for learners at any stage of education (ESU 2008).

8.4   CONCLUSIONS

- It is strongly evident that a streamlined definition of life-long learning is hard to attain (owing to the rather philosophical nature of the concept).
- Real commitment from Ministers is needed for the creation of national policies on life-long learning that can aggressively deal with the current shortcomings namely the elitist nature of life-long learning on a number of levels, such as the cost of recognition of prior learning, the flexibility of such learning as well as tuition costs, inter alia.
- Life-long learning cannot be seen merely as a tool for generating revenue, but rather must be seen as an empowerment tool, which allows more citizens to enhance their abilities and that indirectly contributes to the development of the region.

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9 SOCIAL DIMENSION

The European Students' Union sees the social dimension as a fundamental cornerstone of the Bologna Process, which exists in order to guarantee that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity of our populations.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the Bologna Process now celebrating its ten-year anniversary, the social dimension as part of the process has not been in existence for as long. The introduction of the social dimension in the process followed the students' involvement, acknowledged in Prague. In the Berlin Communiqué, attention to the social dimension was called for, in order to balance the increased emphasis on the competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area, with the goals of improving the social characteristics and reducing inequality, which could indeed contribute to the attractiveness of the EHEA (Communiqué 2003). Yet, it was only in Bergen that the social dimension was taken seriously and the ministers admitted that it was something they had to work on improving, causing it to become one of the action lines.

9.2 OVERVIEW

In Prague, the ministers supported the idea that higher education should be considered a public good and that it should remain a public responsibility (Communiqué 2001). They also reaffirmed the students' plea for more attention to be paid to the social dimension in the Bologna process. In Berlin, in 2003, ministers stressed the need for adequate studying and living conditions for students, in order to eliminate obstacles related to their social and economic background. They also stressed the need for more comparable data on the social and economic situation of students. In that same year ESU pointed out *»that the social dimension should be the heart of the Bologna Process.«* (ESU 2003:13). It also stressed the importance of loan free study financing systems and comprehensive social support systems for students, to guarantee their social well-being.

It was only at the ministerial meeting in Bergen in 2005, that the ministers promised to take active measures to widen access. They promised action through *»...measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling« services with a view to widening access«* (Communiqué 2005:4). They also stressed on the importance of taking the social dimension into account in future stocktaking. After the meeting, a working group on the Social Dimension and Mobility, consisting of both staff and stu-

dents was formed in order to handle the tasks given to the Bologna Follow-up Group. This working group decided that it was not appropriate to define the social dimension too narrowly, due to notable challenges and differences in the social dimension in different higher education systems. However, they suggested that each signatory should have its own strategies and action plans for the social dimension. Additionally, a working group on data collection for this issue was set up. This group reviewed the availability of appropriate data and prepared a pilot study for the London Ministerial Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2007.

In 2006, ESU stressed to signatory countries that there was still much work to do concerning the social dimension (ESU 2006). The lack of data, wider access policies, measures tackling barriers in higher education, supporting the student as a learner and providing high quality education were identified as being the biggest issues to be addressed, in order to achieve social justice within higher education.

In London 2007, the ministers stated that higher education should play a strong role in fostering social cohesion, reducing inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society (Communiqué 2007). They held that the policy should therefore aim to maximise the potential of individuals, in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge-based society. Ministers shared the societal aspiration, that the student body, entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels, should reflect the diversity of our populations. This mentioned aspiration became the definition of the social dimension. They reaffirmed the importance of students being able to complete their studies, without obstacles related to their social and economic background. They promised to continue their efforts, to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.

»Student Unions from only 14 countries (Finland (SAMOK), Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxemburg, Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands (ISO), Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, UK) consider the social dimension to be a real priority for their current government. Unions from 14 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands (LSVB), Poland, Serbia, Sweden, Ukraine, and Portugal) claim that the social dimension is not a priority for the government. The unions from Belgium—Flemish Community, Czech Republic, Denmark, France and Finland (SYL) state that their government sees the social dimension as important but that they don't always see it in reality. Even less student unions believe that the social dimension is a priority for all the higher education institutions in their country. 9 unions claim the social dimension is a priority in HEI's, 14 state the opposite. 9 unions say the situation depends on the HEI: to some it is very important, to others it is not.« (ESU2009:20-21). Further, similar conclusions were made two years earlier, in the previous *Bologna With Student Eyes* publication (ESU 2007).

In this context, the European Student Union (ESU) sees that it is a shame that no real action has been taken over the past ten years, to develop the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area.

In 2009, in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, the concept of the social dimension was widened to include issues pertaining to equal opportunity and enabling wider access into higher education for underrepresented groups (Communiqué 2009). In 2007 it was made clear in the ministerial communiqué, that the social dimension should be integrated into the stocktaking report, which meant that the Social Dimension Coordination Group was formed and its first report was presented in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve. In the report it was pointed out that the national reports submitted on the social dimension were lacking congruence—with some reports being extremely detailed and others not including suitable data for further analysis (Rauhvargers 2009). ESU finds it highly problematic that National Action Plans and Country Reports have made little or no difference. ESU hence calls for more concrete implementation, realistic actions and commitments on a national level.

»On the level of the Bologna Process many countries have established policies about social dimension but have not put this high on the political agenda. It is important that we keep the ideas behind the social dimension in because it is the social dimension that makes the EHAE to something more then an academic enterprise« Koen Geven (ESU 2010a).

Since Bergen, Ministerial Communiqués have been giving increasing weight to the social dimension, partly as a result of the awareness raised by students and other stakeholders. Despite the disappointing quality of the National Action Plans, ministers in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve expressed the political will to make the improvement of the social dimension a reality. They expressed a wish for more concrete actions and asked the BFUG to define the indicators used for measuring and monitoring mobility and the social dimension, in conjunction with the data collection. The current working plan of the BFUG, includes a Social Dimension Working Group, mandated with defining these indicators and supporting the implementation of the social dimension on a national level.

Since 2003 the ministers—after substantial pressure by the students—have asked for more *comparable data on the social and economic situation of students*. However, this can not be achieved by asking the BFUG to define indicators for measuring and monitoring social conditions in the participating countries. Such indicators must be defined after a consensus has been found between the national agencies responsible for joint data collection. Currently, data is only available for countries taking part in the EUROSTUDENT, Eurostat and Eurydice research, which do not cover all the countries in the Bologna Process. The European Students' Union challenges Ministers to declare that all Bologna participating countries should join such action, especially EUROSTUDENT and to create proper National Action Plans and start making them a reality. There is no reason ministers should continue waiting for comparable statistics.

9.3   CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Currently, the social dimension in higher education is understood as including equality of opportunity (particularly for under-represented groups), access to higher education and social services for students, as the most pressing issues. These are significant components of higher education and the EHEA. ESU underlines the social dimension as a fundamental cornerstone of the entire reform agenda, in order to guarantee that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity of our populations.

Interviewed for the publication, Leslie Wilson (EUA) held that *»the social dimension is woven into everything and cannot be separated. From the national reports, it is clear that every country have different priorities—we are talking about many different things here: Access, Lifelong Learning, the social dimension with regards to mobility. There are many different and ongoing challenges. Thus the social dimension is a very important cross cutting issue.«* (ESU 2010b).

ESU believes in a European Higher Education Area that promotes high quality education for all, based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. *»Students from 19 countries claim tuition fees have increased in the past few years. In some countries the increase has been in-line with inflation. In other countries, tuition fees have increased more than inflation. In the Netherlands the government will have the students pay a lot more in the coming years: fees will increase by 22 euro for the next ten years. In Slovenia, the fees have increased with the justification that HEI's need more funding, while in Italy they increased because of public budget cuts. In the UK (expect Scotland) fees have increased with the justification that HEI's need more funding and that the benefits of higher education are such that individuals should contribute more to the cost of its provision«* (ESU 2009:27).

For ESU, it is also important that all the participants of Bologna Process recognise and identify obstacles to access, participation and completion, within the under-represented groups: students from a lower social-economical background, ethnic-cultural minorities, migrant children, students from less economically developed regions, students with disabilities, gender, LGBT students, students with jobs, students with children, students thirty-five years or older, Religious minorities, refugees/asylum seekers/students without residence permit and those who have to leave higher education for some reason.

ESU also stresses that there should be a clear target established, to increase participation across EHEA by 2020, in order to ensure participative equity and that study financing remains a responsibility of society, not the individual. The following policy priorities should be also specifically assured:

- The ministries must deliver on their National Action Plans (ESU 2008:6).
- Anti-discrimination legislation covering higher education must be set up so that all kinds of discrimination can be fought (ESU 2008:6).
- Education should be free and accessible for all, at all points of entry. This must be complemented by accessible and parent-independent grants, which should be an essential part of student financing systems. ESU rejects tuition fees (and similar study-related fees), which deter entry to higher education for certain social groups and which negatively affect the study progression of students.
- Where tuition fees are present, measures should be taken so that everyone can still study and not be deterred by the high costs of education. Means to compensate the burden of tuition fees include grants and sliding scales of repayment of loans (ESU 2006:8).
- Student services play an essential role in providing an appropriate study framework and supporting students. They should be subsidised sufficiently, to provide student housing, transportation discounts, healthy food provisions, sport facilities, medical care, discounts for cultural activities, etc. Students' services must be accessible for all students, including international students. These services must pay special attention to making studying and student life accessible for disabled students (ESU 2008:6).
- It is important that there are independent research bureaus to collect the data on progress, concerning the social dimension on national and European levels. ESU specifically supports the efforts of the current data providers in the BFUG, Eurostat, Eurydice and EUROSTUDENT, in their capacity building efforts.

9.4   CONCLUSIONS

The social dimension has been and will be a crucial part of the Bologna Process. However, we must make sure that promises are met, and that actions will follow the repeated commitments of the ministers. Students are the most valuable resource that Europe has for its future. The European higher education area can be true, only with a fully functional social dimension.

Lack of data cannot be a real obstacle to the implementation of social dimension, at a national level. ESU sees that there is no reason why ministers should continue waiting for comparable statistics. ESU also whishes to point out that it is a shame that no real action has been taken during past ten years to develop the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area.

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10 EMPLOYABILITY

The demand to ensure that academic programmes contribute to ›employability‹ is certainly not a new concept within the Bologna-related discussions. Yet, it was only in 2007 that the Communiqué gave the issue prominence, making seven references to the concept of employability and dedicating a whole section to the subject-matter.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The term ›employability‹, is itself a bit vague and sometimes even controversial. Previous debates on employability, such as the official ones held during the Bologna Seminar on Employability (in the context of the Bologna Process in Bled/Slovenia in 2004), have defined the concept as; *»A set of achievements— skills, understandings and personal attributes—that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.«*. For the purpose of the Bologna Follow-up Group, employability is defined as the ability to gain initial employment, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market.

Thus, one can argue that employability has a double-faced meaning, with a common core. From the viewpoint of society, employability is being able to fulfil a task which is meaningful enough for society, or at least for one or many of its members to be willing to pay for it. However, from the viewpoint of the individual, it is being able to earn one's living by one's own work.

Key Bologna Process stakeholders—including the students themselves—have often stressed that the aim of the discussions on employability cannot merely be to respond to short-term labour market concerns. As highlighted by the 2003 *Bologna With Student Eyes* (ESIB 2003), a number of national students' unions expressed fear that the excessive focus on employability within the Bologna debate was leading to the creation of reforms suited exclusively to the needs of the labour market.

ESU sees employability as a process, rather than as a strict relationship between completion rates and employment statistics (ESU policy paper on employability 2006). It is acknowledged that education is a tool that prepares individuals for the labour market, but that complimenting this, an education system must put the interest of the citizens of society at its centre and one of its main goals must be their holistic development.

10.2 OVERVIEW

Employability was one of the core objectives of the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, with the creation of a European Higher Education Area being seen as a way of promoting the mobility and employability of citizens. In the Sorbonne Declaration, employability was also identified as one of the positive outcomes of having set comparable degrees across the EHEA.

In 2001, employability featured in the communiqué again. This time ministers called upon the higher education institutions to speed up the development of modules, courses and curricula, calling for a more »European« content, orientation or organisation within all strata of the higher education sphere. This was seen as a prerequisite for further increasing graduate employability, as well as the important European dimensions of higher education.

Two years later, the higher education sphere welcomed the ministers' appeal to institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement for fostering employability, whilst allowing them to benefit from the added transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems. However, even with this simple instrument, progress was relatively slow. In fact, in as late as 2009, the *Bologna With Student Eyes* survey showed that student representatives remained worried about the lack of awareness of the Diploma Supplement.

In 2005, the Bologna process had no official goals or principles on employability. It was only in 2007 that the agreement on the need for data collection on employability was identified as a necessary action line to be included in the stocktaking report.

The Bologna working group on employability identified a set of issues within this debate. Predominantly, this revolved around the over-supply of graduates in particular fields of the economy, as a result of the increasing number of students graduating in the 1980s and 1990s. Simultaneously, it was acknowledged that in some areas of study, access to progression routes, to further cycles of education-such as masters or doctoral programmes was still minimal for particular societal groups.

At this stage, the discussion on employability within the Bologna Process was to a certain degree overshadowed by the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy, under the heading *»Agenda for Growth and Jobs«*, which emphasised the economic facet of education. Indeed, increasing employment rates was among the most important success criteria within this Strategy (European Commission 2007a:7).

Despite the political commitment, the stocktaking report in 2009 stressed that (as in 2007), the answers from the countries did not provide sufficient information on the statistics for graduate employment to make EHEA–wide comparisons. Some countries stated that they were unable to provide data on the graduates, because the Bologna three-cycle degree system had only been introduced a short time before, and that no graduates had yet emerged from the new system.

The Working Group also held that the employability of graduates at the Bachelors level was extremely problematic in a number of countries. This was due to the common-held perception of those who had graduated and of graduate-level employers, that the qualification was not adequate for employment. Indeed, this was confirmed further by the 2005 *Bologna With Student Eyes*, with countries stressing that the main problem was not only the implementation of the new degrees and their acceptance, but also the lack of employer knowledge, on the equivalence of the old and new degrees in terms of qualifications. A major practical issue stemmed from the fact that the new degrees had the same name as the old ones, but were of different study lengths and gave different qualifications, which lead to an over- or underestimation of certain degrees by employers (ESU 2005).

In this same declaration and following in the footsteps of the 2003 communiqué, employability was also cited in the context of mobility, transferable skills and degree structures. An appeal was made for the BFUG to analyse in further detail—with stakeholders, governments and HEIs—ways to improve employability at each of the three-cycle levels and in the context of life-long learning. Ministers highlighted the need for further communication between governments, HEIs and employers, in order to outline the rationale use for the new three-cycle degree system. This was particularly needed, given that the outcomes of Trends III showed that in only three countries, was it the case that more than fifty percent of institutions had close involvement with professional associations and employers. These were; Ireland (sixty percent), the UK (sixty-one percent) and Lithuania (eighty-seven and a half percent). Trends III also reported that in Belgium, Spain, Turkey and Greece, roughly fifty percent of HEIs thought that professional organisations and employers were rarely involved in curricular development (Reichert and Tauch 2003).

One of the conclusions reached by the Working Group in 2007—based to a large extent on the perspective of the employers—was that graduates finishing their studies with substantial work experience tend to be more competitive in the labour market. Employers also expressed their discontent that universities were failing to acknowledge the employability agenda as part of their mission and purpose.

It was perhaps in this spirit, that at the 2009 Ministerial Conference, it was agreed that governments, HEIs and employers would maximise the accessibility and quality of career guidance services to their students and alumni. It was agreed that this would be complemented by work placements embedded in study programmes and on-site learning.

With labour markets increasing the demands for high-level skills and transversal competences, ministers in Leuven expressed the need for higher education to equip students with the knowledge, skills and competences needed throughout their professional life. With the repercussions of the international financial instability already being felt, particularly vis-à-vis the employability of new graduates, ministers agreed that employability empowers the individual to fully seize the opportunities in changing labour markets.

10.3   LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Employability« has always been deemed as highly important, with Trends in 2005 reporting that ninety-one percent of the heads of European HEIs regard the employability of their graduates to be an important or even very important issue. It further stated that thirteen out of thirty-six ministries declared employability to be a very important criterion in curricular reform. Nineteen of those thirty-six saw it as important and only four as not very important. Employability is of particular importance to business/economics (very important: seventy-two percent) and to technology/engineering (fifty-eight percent). Yet, whilst countries cite the importance of employability, they have failed to gathered sufficient data to support this assertion. With the growing number of bachelor graduates and an economic environment in constant flux, there is an immediate need to identify the common causes of graduate unemployment across the EHEA.

As the European Universities Association has often highlighted, the attitude of professors and institutions needs to change, in order to genuinely seek dialogue with other stakeholders. Yet, it would be perhaps be perfectly logical to argue that, as indicated by UNICE (now Business Europe), there is the need for a coherent strategy, in order to ensure that measures taken within Member States have a real impact on the general employment situation. In addition, strategic alliances may be formed with universities in the same region, in order to coordinate cooperation with stakeholders within industry and the world of employment. Yet, as ESU has highlighted, this should not be at the expense of academic freedom. Even given its usefulness, the direct integration between the professional and academic world must be approached with care.

Business Europe went as far as holding that raising the employability of graduates is a key issue for improving the functioning of European labour markets. *»The evolution towards process-oriented and interdisciplinary work organisation increasingly requires employees to be adaptable, to develop problem solving skills and to work in teams. Graduates' employability thus has to become a key mission for universities and other higher education institutions. This has to be reflected to a greater extent in the design of study courses and become a main criterion of quality for future degrees«* (BusinessEurope 2007).

The local reality is that recent developments in the economic sphere have clearly indicated that governments are not willing to finance higher education, unless it is relevant to the labour market. Equally, students are striving to earn a living, amongst other things. However, these positions counter the principles that *»the main goals of education are personal development, promotion of and education for active citizenship, developing and spreading knowledge and humanity as well as fostering critical thinking and learning to learn«* (ESIB Policy Paper on Employability 2004).

In this spirit, ESU endorses the reform of curricula and higher education systems geared towards achieving desirable social goals, rather than short-term political objectives. This is also the plea that stu-

dents have been making even within the Lisbon Strategy context, in which the risk of a short-term vision to reach political objectives can be seen as being more imminent. Nonetheless, as national students' unions have stated, in the 2009 edition of *Bologna With Student Eyes*, curricular reform must be combined with work placements or traineeships, support services for seeking employment and stakeholder involvement alongside proper graduate tracking.

Ultimately, ESU believes that, in correlation with the proper use of learning outcomes and qualification frameworks, in the coming years more commitment needs to be shown by governments, so that students are truly assisted in the recognition of their own skills and competences. This is the key to sustainable employability, because it makes all of the qualifications students have recognised and offers them a transparent tool, in which they can track their own learning path as they find best fit.

Further, whilst ESU supports the idea that universities should not be ›ivory towers‹, essentially students must be supported in orientating themselves and in gaining those skills that make them adaptable to any societal context, and life-long learners. We certainly hope that improving employability will not mean a direct and rigid link to short-time economic interests.

As we are drawing the line on the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the Bologna Process, a reflection on the achievements vis-a-vis employability shows that, despite the promises and willingness to move away from the mentality that stemmed during the Industrial Revolution and towards an education that truly values the human being, no significant progress has been made. The necessary framework has been identified, but actions with respect to it have been scarce and continue to contribute further to unemployment of new graduates across the continent.

10.4   CONCLUSIONS

- Evaluation shows that many bachelor students still experience difficulties in getting a relevant job, without a masters degree. More promotion of the three-cycle system within civil society, must be done at a national level.
- Employability should be taken into account in curricula development, but this must be done with caution and must not be the only form of enhancing employability.
- More data ought to be collected on graduate employability, which could serve as a basis to interlink employability with qualification frameworks, the use of learning outcomes and life-long learning strategies.
- ESU proposes that, amongst others:
  - **A** First cycle degrees encompass both general and specific disciplinary knowledge, as well as the development of personal qualities, the capacity to approach new issues, communication skills and other transferable skills
  - **B** Second cycle degrees should either encompass specialised disciplinary knowledge, or offer cross-disciplinary knowledge from different academic fields.
  - **C** Third cycle degrees ought to promote academic excellence in research based on the Dublin Descriptors.

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11 STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING

»We must put students in the centre and discuss the entire learning system and this requires a big shift in attitudes of all relevant actors. It will probably take one or two generations because there is much lagging in European HEIs. In addition there is a lag in understanding what SCL means.« Bastian Bauman, Secretary General of the Magna Charta Observatory (ESU 2010a).

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the traditional higher education system, study programmes, courses or modules, teaching and learning methods, as well as student assessment have been predominantly designed, organised and carried out from a teacher perspective. The design centred around which issues would be taught to students. Often it has not been explicit what the goals of a learning process are, from the perspective of a student.

Student-centred learning (SCL) is an approach to education which aims at overcoming this problem, by focusing on the student (learner) and his or her needs, rather than being centred around the teacher's input perspective. This approach has many implications for the design and flexibility of curriculum, course content, and interactivity of the learning process.

Student centred learning—also styled »Learner centred education«—is not an old concept in the current European educational context. It was initially created as a concept by researchers from the fields of pedagogy and education, and has been discussed in higher education institutions and national settings in many countries for some time now. However, SCL gained increasing prominence in the European educational environment, one notable example being the fact that it was recently included in the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial declaration which stated that; *»European higher education also faces the major challenge and the ensuing opportunities of globalisation and accelerated technological developments with new providers, new learners and new types of learning. Student-centred learning and mobility will help students develop the competences they need in a changing labour market and will empower them to become active and responsible citizens«* (Communiqué 2009:1).

As opposed to other educational trends, which are largely decided or inspired as a result of a national or intergovernmental process, SCL is to a far greater degree being shaped by grass-roots initiatives within institutions and even individual departments. Whilst many of the tools (learning outcomes, transferable credits, qualification frameworks) that might facilitate SCL have been reflected in the Bologna process, there is still a rather wide tendency to apply them as procedures for pre-existing teacher-centred educational forms.

11.2   OVERVIEW AND EVOLUTION

ORIGINS AND EXTENT

Notions such as learner-centred forms of education are not very new. Progressive outlooks on teaching and learning processes have been discussed by scholars from as long ago as the nineteenth century. Initially, the debate was largely centred on making changes in the pedagogical methods that were used, and in making educational processes flexible to suit as many learners as possible.

The idea that learners construct their knowledge better when they are actively taking part in it's construction became somewhat popular in the second half of the twentieth century. Theories such as constructivism and consturctionism brought a new perspective on epistemology in numerous institutions, often in those that had applied sciences as a field of study: *»From constructivist theories of psychology we take a view of learning as a reconstruction rather than as a transmission of knowledge. Then we extend the idea of manipulative materials to the idea that learning is most effective when part of an activity the learner experiences as constructing a meaningful product«* (Papert 1989).

The apparition of curricula and assessment based on constructivist methods often discouraged traditional approaches based on direct instruction of facts and standard methods. Ideas such as flexible learning paths or outcome-based assessment of learning results became increasingly promoted as an alternative (especially in Anglo-Saxon countries), but even so most institutions continued to use traditional approaches of knowledge accumulation, based on a rigid, pre-determined and non-flexible curricula.

PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING

By the later years of the twentieth century, an increasing number of institutions experimented with action-based learning, flexible learning paths, increasing the number of electives and increased student feedback in curricula development and course evaluation. Many of these changes were often top-down, and at times were met with resistance from students, upon whom the changes were imposed during the course of one cycle. Most changes were, of course, linked to the pedagogical approaches used in institutions, as switching the teaching method is often confused with full-fledged SCL. For example, many of our unions—especially those in Western and North-Western Europe—reported increased usage of activity-based learning in their institutions (ESU 2010b):

Some measures that are conducive to and supportive of SCL were included in the Bologna process framework, with learning-outcomes, defined qualifications and transferable credits being just some of the transformations that had a role in making the learning process more student-centred. However, *a la carte* implementation in lower tiers (both national and institutional) has often been too diluted for the

- ● It is widespread in the educational system
- ● Exists in specific cases
- ● It is seldom used
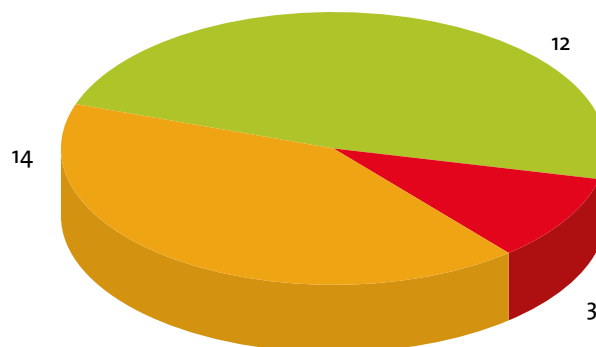
efficiency of Bologna-inspired measures to have a sufficient impact in changing the educational paradigm.

When asked whether they feel that individual students now have more control over their education, nine unions, from countries such as Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria and Slovakia replied that the changes are rather small, or non-existent, while in Germany there have even been cases in which students have suffered as a result of reduced flexibility. There were of course, countries such as Belgium—the Flemish community, Croatia, Norway, Spain and several others in which unions felt that positive changes have occurred (ESU 2010b). These variations are caused both by the depth of the changes applied at national level in the Bologna context, and by the previous flexibility of the educational systems in each country and at each institution.

Of course, many problem-ridden areas remain. For example, when it comes to switching to outcomes-based education, only the unions in Ireland and Croatia reported that all educational content is described in terms of learning outcomes. (ESU 2010b). It is important to note that the proper use of learning outcomes is one of the few ways in which the evaluation and measurement of educational attainment can be conducted in a fully objective and meaningful way, whilst also permitting the construction of proper learning paths, in order to gain the desired qualifications.

The fact also remains that in many institutions, a change in the pedagogical methods used is quite difficult to achieve. Indeed, this seems so within innovation of teaching, as out of twenty-nine unions that replied to our survey, only nine reported widespread use of teacher-training programs for teaching-learning enhancement, and in some of these cases the programmes were not compulsory (ESU 2010b).

Improvements in teaching and learning processes at an institutional level are also likely to be affected by the fact that increased focus on research is often at the expense of the educational process that

fig. 15—Are the results of study
programmes designed and measured
based on learning outcomes?
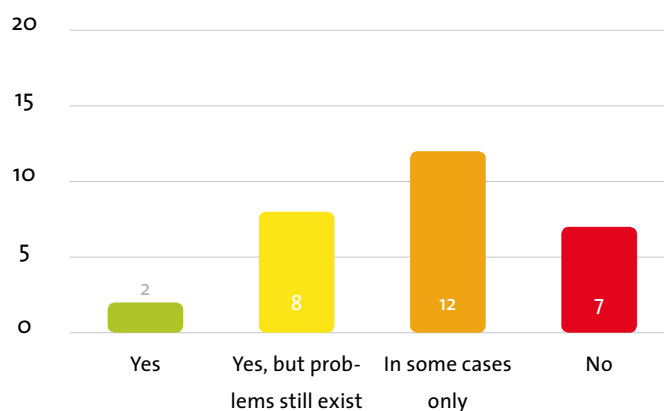
exists outside the research context (fifteen out of twenty-nine unions reported an increasing focus on research). Our Norwegian unions reported that *»it is commonly said that academic staff have the freedom to research and a duty to teach«*, and several other unions reported a similar view held with institutions in their own countries (ESU 2010b).

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULA DESIGN AND COURSE CONTENT

Student centred learning is, of course, more than just a set of pedagogical approaches. It is not possible to implement SCL in a meaningful way without the active participation of the students, since it is not authentic learner-centred education if the actor who is ›at the centre‹ does not have a role in defining the educational process. Indeed, the level to which students are consulted varies widely, and is often insufficient. In many cases, feel-good measures are taken to include students in decision-taking processes, but only appear on paper and are not followed up to any extent.

In some cases, students have control over the selection of part of their curricula, but only four unions reported that students can, on average, chose more than twenty percent of their curricula. Citing either high degrees of institutional autonomy, or rigid curricula associated with highly technical fields of study, unions in Norway, Belgium, Macedonia, Denmark, Germany and several other countries reported that there is no national benchmark on the number of electives (ESU 2010b).

When it comes to curricula design, student consultation exists, with eight unions reporting that students are consulted at all levels, and only one reporting that little or no consultation exists (ESU 2010b). However, the extent to which the consultation process has an impact on the final components of the curricula remains open to debate.

Among ESU members that answered our BAFL survey, all but three reported the existence of at least some form of student evaluation of teaching and/or course content. However, most reported that these have a very limited impact, except in those cases where the evaluation is part of the institutional quality assurance programmes. This is another example of the fact that some positive measures continue to remain feel-good gestures, aimed at building an image of progressive attitudes without having any real impact.

As ESU alumni Koen Geven pointed out, *»Students are adults and must have ownership of their own education. Students aren't going to the supermarket. It's about a balance of power and recognising that the students have an equal voice to that of the professor. When it comes to the implementation, simply give students a bigger voice in governance! They will then fight for these themselves and on their own terms. ... Staff and students must work together, and have a mutual ownership of the teaching process«* (ESU 2010c).

11.3   CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

There are huge regional gaps in terms of openness to a shift from an input-focused teacher to an outcome-based learning paradigm. To one end, some progress has been recorded in several countries, particularly in the North-Western part of Europe, though selectively institutions across the continent are studying a change in the way that the teaching and learning activity is conducted. However, positive examples of change are counterbalanced by a resistance to a paradigm shift to student-centred learning in many other institutions. This is particularly true for the countries of Eastern Europe, where the pace of change in teaching and learning has been rather slow.

A major problem is a lack of courage or will to go beyond simply changing the procedures and wording behind pre-existing educational structures and to make real changes on the structures themselves. In all too many institutions, ECTS has not led to greater flexibility, learning outcomes are merely used as a descriptive bureaucratic exercise and are not based on any realistic and meaningful calculation of student workload at all and the recognition of prior and alternative learning is still a taboo, as higher education institutions are often still seen as the only legitimate source of learning. In our belief this is wrong, in the context of outcomes-based education, and ESU has stressed since 2006 that *»[...] learners should never be disadvantaged on the basis of where their learning has taken place«* (ESU 2006:1).

Whilst the increasing importance of research can be welcomed, including in terms of its usage within the educational process as a form of practical learning, it is very important that higher education institutions do not forget their educational mission. This educational mission, however, needs to be adapted to the realities of life-long Learning and learner-centred formation. Force-feeding students with information does not produce a *foie gras* of knowledge and it reduces the added value of higher education in the overall personal development of the people which graduate.

Of course, the goal of true SCL implies an extensive number of changes that need to be gone through. As EUA Secretary General Lesley Wilson pointed out, *»To address student-Centred learning, 10 or 20 other things must be done, and it must be a conscious decision for the institutions. Student-Centred learning can only be implemented if everyone is committed and there are resources, student support services and staff development. Student support services and advising services for students are very important. Student-Centred learning requires a change in the organisation of teaching and learning«* (ESU 2010d).

11.4 CONCLUSIONS

When it comes to student-centred learning, the situation is more difficult to judge than when it comes to some of the traditional Bologna action lines. First of all, the decision-making process is not so much spurred by national-level decision-making as it is by institutional initiative. This means that the level to which learner-centred education is being fostered varies considerably within the various national contexts. Overall, however, we can draw a few of broad conclusions:

- Whilst notions such as student-centred learning predate the Bologna process, the level to which there has been a change in the teaching/learning process at institutions is, overall, quite low in most EHEA countries.
- There are as of yet insufficient teacher training programmes, focusing on innovative teaching methods. Resistance to change has lead to many institutions combining student-centred approaches with traditional teaching often in the same programme.
- Teaching and learning are often neglected, in favour of research and/or postgraduate studies. This risks reducing the investment in the improvement of the learning process at some institutions.
- Student consultation with regards to issues such as curricula development and teaching/learning methods remains highly problematic. SCL is difficult to attain without student participation.
- Aspects of Bologna implementation, such as NQFs, learning outcomes, ECTS and flexible learning paths are not fully understood in many institutions and they are not applied in a manner that is conducive to flexible, learner-centred education. They are often used as bureaucratic ›musts‹ in the context of previously existing teaching practices. This must change.

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12 FINANCING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Within the Bologna Process, higher education has always been considered a public good. In Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve 2009, higher education funding was put in the spotlight on the Bologna agenda and in this context, increased public investment in higher education has been promised and more diverse funding sources and methods have been called for.

12.1 INTRODUCTION: FINANCING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education funding has always been a topic of debate, although it has not been a particular focus of the Bologna Process. In spite of this, at the last ministerial summit, the topic was given specific attention in the ministerial communiqué. For students, the funding of higher education has been an ongoing concern, one which has been worsened by the ongoing economic crisis.

The financial situation of the higher education sector, for many countries is not improving, and consequently education funding and financial support for students has become the biggest area of concern for ESU's member unions. Across the EHEA, tuition fees are being introduced, so that students now pay for their education, at the point of use. Further, where tuition fees already exist, the fees are increasing. Making matters worse are the ever-louder calls to close the higher education funding gap by instituting ›marketisation‹ measures. ESU believes these moves are contradictory to the intention of the Ministers, regarding the social dimension and the public responsibility of higher education.

12.2 OVERVIEW

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

For over a decade, national ministers, responsible for higher education, have described higher education as a public good and have stressed public responsibility towards the area. The Prague Communiqué stated that: *»higher education should be considered a public good and is and will remain a public responsibility (regulations etc.)«* (Communiqué 2001:1). Two years later, the Berlin Communiqué linked the public responsibility to the social dimension:

»The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level. In that context,

Ministers reaffirm their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility.« (Communiqué 2003:1).

In Berlin, ministers stated that financial support for higher education institutions would be necessary to achieve the goals they had set out:

»Ministers understand that there are obstacles inhibiting the achievement of these goals and these cannot be resolved by Higher Education Institutions alone. It requires strong support, including financial, and appropriate decisions from national Governments and European Bodies.« (Communiqué 2003:7).

In the Bergen Communiqué (2005) and the London Communiqué (2007), similar statements were made. In the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué of 2009, ministers linked higher education to the economic crisis and emphasised the need for public investment. The preamble stated:

»Our societies currently face the consequences of a global financial and economic crisis. In order to bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, a dynamic and flexible European higher education will strive for innovation on the basis of the integration between education and research at all levels. We recognise that higher education has a key role to play if we are to successfully meet the challenges we face and if we are to promote the cultural and social development of our societies. Therefore, we consider public investment in higher education of utmost priority.« (Communiqué 2009:1).

In the same communiqué, the ministers stated funding would be a priority for the next decade. In addition to emphasising the need for public funding, they called for the diversification of funding methods and sources:

»Higher education institutions have gained greater autonomy along with rapidly growing expectations to be responsive to societal needs and to be accountable. Within a framework of public responsibility we confirm that public funding remains the main priority to guarantee equitable access and further sustainable development of autonomous higher education institutions. Greater attention should be paid to seeking new and diversified funding sources and methods.« (Communiqué 2009:5).

The above paragraph was one of the most debated parts of the communiqué. Students across Europe, as well as several countries, wanted to amend this statement, to clarify that this could not be interpreted a call for tuition fees. However, some ministers did not wish to make a statement against tuition fees and others wanted to specify a call for more business funding. This resulted in the paragraph above, which has little clarity on the matter.

FUNDING GAP

In recent decades, public funding for higher education has not adequately reflected the large increase in student numbers, resulting in a gap in financial resources (ESU 2009). In most European countries, the growth in student numbers has not been followed up, by a proportional increase in the expenditure per student, as we can see from the OECD (2009) data gathered between 2000 and 2006. The current higher education funding gap is an issue of institutional, national and international concern. Extensive changes in both higher education and in wider society have increased the need for a full revision of the way higher education is funded.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

At the international level, there has been increasing debate over the financing of higher education. However, in the Bologna Process the area is always cited but never given much weight, or concrete action lines. When national students' unions, (responding to the ESU questionnaire made for this publication) were asked if changes to the funding of higher education were linked to the Bologna Process, the majority said this was not the case. Instead, some unions reported the influence of pro cost-sharing (tuition fee) organisations, such as the OECD and the EU education and training programme (influenced by the Lisbon Strategy), as greater influences on governmental funding policies.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

In the face of the current economic situation, an increasing number of Governments are neglecting their responsibility to higher education, by making funding-cuts, with, inevitably, students suffering the consequences. The results of these cuts are increasing tuition fees and higher debt, combined with bigger loan payments, decreased opportunities to obtain loans and grants, and reductions in student support. In parallel, students have fewer opportunities and mainly rely on their family and/or jobs to finance their studies (Eurostat 2009). Furthermore youth unemployment levels have also been increasing rapidly and considering the proportion of students who work out of necessity, this poses a further challenge.

In this light, students from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds will be hit hardest. Without any financial sustainability, the situation will remain just as poor for graduates, who are faced with a lack of employment opportunities after attaining a degree.

In the interviews conducted for this publication Koen Geven (ESU alumnus) has raised the issue of student loans in the economical crisis: *»In recent years we have seen the implementation of more loans to students through private banks. Now the financial crisis has showed that banks are a bad idea when it comes to giving loans to students. After the financial crisis banks will be more risk averse and decrease the amount of loans to students. Thus the governments must back loans for students.«* (ESU 2010a).

12.3 CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

PUBLIC FUNDING

Increased public expenditure on higher education would have a strong positive impact on the supply of highly educated employees (Asplund 2001). Public support schemes that provide direct monetary support to students vary across the Bologna countries. In general, they are based on universal, compensatory or meritocratic criteria. The need for public funding is stressed in the last ministerial communiqué (2009) and is interrelated with the sustainable funding for the future, which is also one of the concerns raised by the European Students' Union (ESU 2005).

OUTPUT-BASED FUNDING MODELS

There has been a change in recent years, from input to more output based funding systems, i.e. the introduction of output criteria in the calculation of funding and through the use of instruments such as performance-based funding and contract funding (Bologna beyond 2010: 24). In the questionnaires conducted for this publication, several national students' unions gave details on the trend towards output-based funding.

One example is the French student union UNEF, reporting that: *»last year, the government announced that, in the future, a more important part of the financing of universities would be based on the performances of the universities. Students protested against this measure but the government seems to still want to implement this. This measure has been influenced by all the debate about rankings and international competition. The government explained that putting a financial pressure on universities would push them to have better results in the international rankings«* (ESU 2010b).

A similar trend was reported by Belgium's Flemish union VVS and Norwegian union StL/NSU, which responded to the survey by stating that: *»the change enabled the government to reward HEIs that have a*

fig. 16—Annual total expenditure on tertiary education institutions per full-time equivalent student (in EUR PPS) including and excluding expenditure on research and ancillary services

● without (core expenditure)
● with R&D and ancillary services
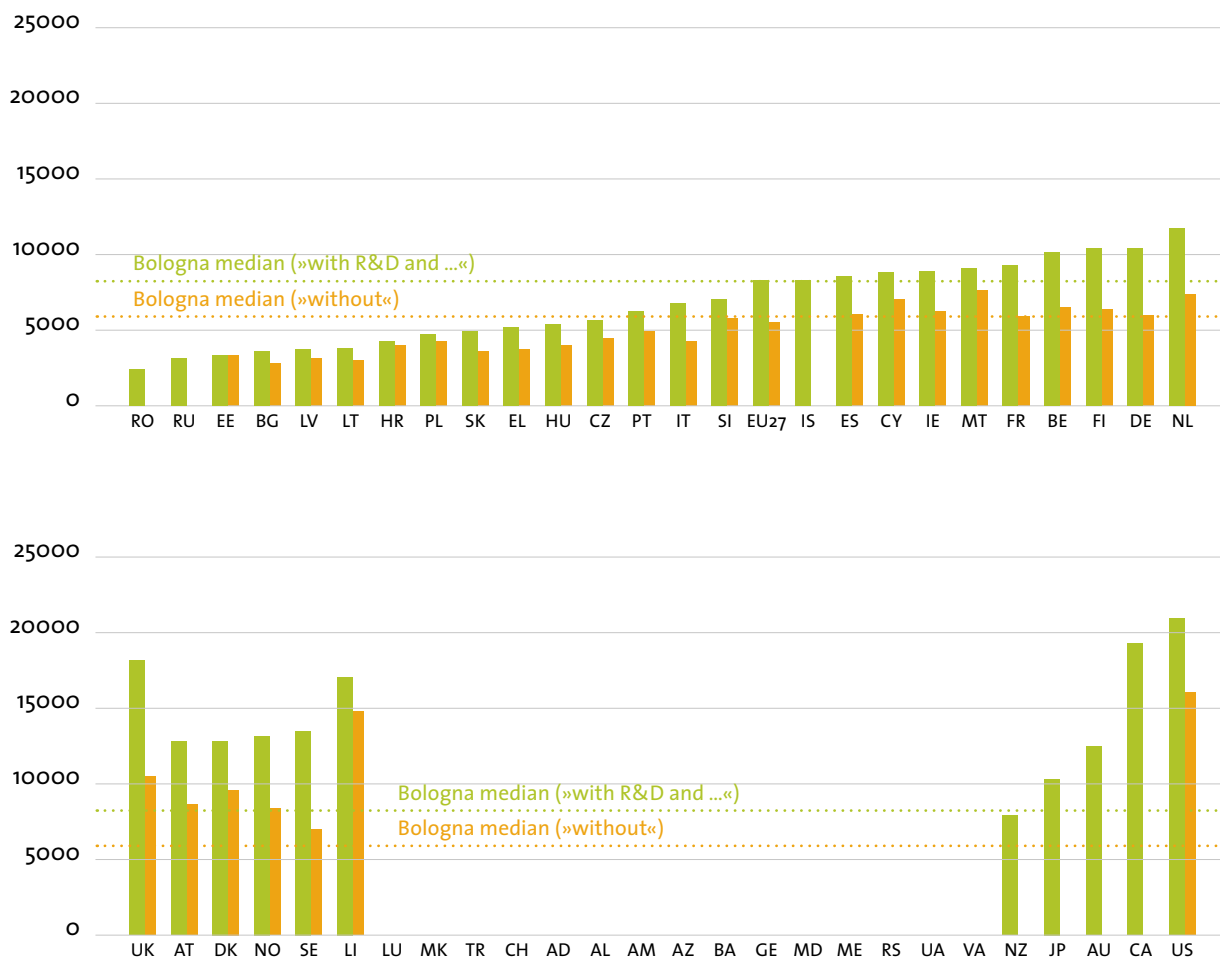
high level of students who graduate (production of ECTSs), as well as HEIs who have a high level of academic publications ...« (ibid).

RESEARCH VS. EDUCATION

Although in recent years there have been an increase in research investment in many countries, this increase has often come at the expense of education funding.

According to the Eurostat/Eurostudent report, *»There appears to be a general trend towards increases in expenditure on research and development and ancillary services, and a concurrent relative decrease in expenditure on core goods and services. For example, for the EU-27 weighted average, the annual core expenditure per student annually increased by only 1.6 % on average between 2003 and 2005, whereas expenditure on R&D and ancillary services increased by 4.1 %.«* (2009:79).

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF FUNDING

In times of limited public investment, alternative sources of funding for higher education are becoming more popular. In the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009), the ministers of the EHEA called for new and diverse funding sources. However, the exploration of non-public funding sources implies an agenda that risks a negative impact on education.

TUITION FEES

Making students pay for their education, in order to close the funding gap in higher education is contrary to the right to education for all; a right asserted in the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (iv) and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (v). The introduction of tuition fees should not be taken as a simpler path towards alternative funding. This merely transforms students from »full members of the higher education community« (Communiqué 2001:1) into customers or consumers. The research conducted by ESU in 2007 shows that in a number of countries the financial situation has been worsened due to the introduction of tuition fees, or increasing the amounts, without increasing the availability of loans and grants.

The previous section outlined trends in European higher education funding, which were identified based on research and questionnaires handed by ESU to national students' unions. Further, ESU highlights its policy recommendations in consideration for the future of higher education financing.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF ESU

- ESU urges the ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to recognise their responsibility to society by funding higher education through public means.
- Although the international debate on the introduction or increase of tuition fees has gathered momentum within the Bologna Process, ESU insists it cannot distract from the need for EHEA to secure sustainable funding in the future, with an emphasis on public funding and social support for students.
- ESU believes that output factors should be based on a number of aspects of academic and student life, not just the quantity of publications or numbers of graduates produced. This would ensure that funding reflects quality output criteria and promote a high quality educational experience.
- ESU calls for a balance between the resourcing of teaching and research activities, so that financial considerations will not force higher education institutions to focus on one at the expense of the other. Output based criteria should not dominate the allocation of public funds.
- Adequate financial resources should be made available for improving the quality of research programmes and developing new approaches to teaching and learning.
- When discussing alternative financing of higher education, it should be remembered that there is no funding without conditions, given that every financing source implies interests and effects on the task and meaning of education. Academic freedom should not be jeopardised in the search for a new source of financing.
- Special attention should be given to the distribution of resources between different disciplines and institutions, in order to ensure that areas of academia with less commercial value are not neglected.
- The setting of quantitative standards of excellence in higher education can encourage competitive rankings, but this does not necessarily improve quality. ESU believes that quantitative standards should not form the basis for the allocation of funds, as it would not serve the purpose of improving quality throughout higher education institutions. Further ESU asserts that rankings can lead to further divisions in society.
- Where they already exist, tuition fees should be critically evaluated. Further, measures should be taken to compensate students from lower socio-economic backgrounds via grants, sliding scales of repayment of loans or bursaries.
- In countries where fees are being implemented, studies on the cost of study and the impact of tuition fees on the access and completion of studies should be undertaken.

12.4   CONCLUSIONS

Financing higher education is a central concern for the academic community and policy-makers on both a Governmental and international level. The core problem of this debate is the funding gap. By permitting budget cuts in higher education financing, the economic, social and intellectual development of our societies will be affected detrimentally and cuts are likely to limit the number of students entering and completing higher education courses. Implementing or raising tuition fees to close the funding gap in higher education is extremely harmful, given that education is a public good and should be publicly funded. ESU believes that only through ensuring proper funding of the higher education sector, can the objectives of the Bologna Process be met. Only with exploration based on expertise, research and consultation with all stakeholders (including students), can the design of a policy and approach to address this problem properly be reached.

Diverse higher education Institution funding models should be considered, but only if they do not limit academic freedom or neglect less commercially viable disciplines. Furthermore, diversified funding must not restrict access to higher education, or prevent students from funding their studies to completion. Lastly, the funding model should not influence study choices, based on the potential financial returns in certain fields.

The view of ESU can best be summed up in the following statement: the type of society the citizens of Europe strive for should be reflected in the way that same society finances higher education.

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MAJOR CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME BEFORE THE NEXT FINISH LINE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the European ministers responsible for higher education were aware that the commitment to build EHEA would require *»constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs«* (Bologna communiqué, 1999).

Bologna at the Finish Line points out, from the student perspective, that a lot of work has been done in the last ten years to reach the Bologna goals, but that it is not yet possible to say that a fully functional European Higher Education Area has been created. At the last conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve ministers jointly agreed that more work needed to be done, in order to achieve the approved goals and they also signalled commitment to investing in the process for another ten years, in order to reach the goals set. Due to the fact that the progress made, has still fallen short in 2010, a new finish line was deemed to be needed. Through ongoing work and the encouragement of the participation of students in the Bologna Process on all levels, ESU agrees that the Bologna process has reached some goals. For one thing, it is obvious that there is now a European forum on higher education, which clearly did not exist before. However, overall, there are still major issues to be solved before we can deem the end result a functioning higher education area that stretches all across Europe.

1.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

BOLOGNA À LA CARTE

ESU coined the term *Bologna à la carte* years ago, when monitoring the process. Numerous stakeholders and ministry representatives agreed with this assessment over time. Looking at the results in part B of this publication, it must be restated that the Bologna aims cannot be reached as long as member states are approaching the implementation in an à la carte way, picking what is convenient and not putting in effort to achieving more fundamental changes or into those areas and issues that are of less a priority of governments. In some cases, convenience has been responded to by grassroots resistance, inspired either by reform fatigue, or by poor-implementation of previous Bologna action lines.

One of the most complex issues that has arisen in the Bologna context has been that of the **different paces of the implementation of the Process**. This might fundamentally endanger the vision of a common EHEA. Not only do countries have different starting points in terms of meeting the goals, they have also begun at different times and had widely differing national contexts at the beginning of their individual Bologna implementation processes. In the Leuven/-Louvain-la-Neuve build up, there were several voices whispering of heading full-speed towards new goals. Further, as different types of reports show, the Process has had its star performing countries in some action lines, yet there has been far less willingness or capacity to overcome the imbalances between countries. Naturally, the floating mobility indicators serve the most ardent example. Thus there are countries impatient to move on and others struggling to catch up. It is rather a classical dilemma of deepening cooperation, or expanding it by welcoming new members, that characterises the Bologna Process today.

One of the main points of origin of these differences is caused by the widely different national contexts. For example, learning outcomes have existed as a concept in some North-Western European countries even before the Bologna process, but they represent a largely alien concept for many countries in the Eastern half of the continent. This automatically created a smoother path for the creation of outcome-based national qualification frameworks and for the proper usage of ECTS, for countries that did not find the concept too different from prior practices. However, those that did not have anything remotely similar in use within institutions, found the path to full and proper implementation much more difficult.

An added problem is the fact that countries outside the EU-27/EEA/CH framework do not benefit from the existence of the further integrative mechanisms specific to the European Union. This is particularly visible in areas such as mobility. Whilst students from one EU/EEA country can go to another and benefit from identical rights, students in Bologna member states, outside of the Union and its close partners, still need to obtain a visa and numerous connected permits, whilst having minimal financial support. Henceforth, we can say that political circumstances present further obstacles to a balanced implementation of the Bologna process.

Evidently, there are new action lines that have been pushed by only few countries, mostly the more developed North-West European countries that have possibly lower interest in older topics. These action lines—such as multidimensional transparency tools and the inclusion of non-public financing—contradict older action lines and have been adopted with non-uniform support by all countries, thus leading actually to a creation of multiple finish lines within the Bologna Process. It is an indication that some countries want to move on, whilst in EHEA there is no common implementation achieved. This is essentially a circumstance of the à la carte approach, but it also indicates that countries still have very different goals and thus they are willing to have a multi-speed Bologna Process.

ABSTRACT AND COMPLEX GOALS

Another problem of this process encompassing forty-six countries all over Europe is that its goals are often formulated in an abstract way, in order to make it possible for every member state to agree to such a goal and for it to be acceptable in the national context. This however proves a problem for the implementation, given that on the national and institutional level many Bologna goals are rather disconnected to the reality on the ground. Examples of areas encountering this problem are; the social dimension, mobility and lifelong learning and also quality assurance. There should be more focus on actually pushing forward with creating national action plans with relevance to the more overarching and difficult action lines mentioned. National-specific objectives should be clearly formulated and once the work commences, the results will thus be more tangible and will also be so for institutions and local stakeholders, rather than them remaining at the level of intergovernmental lip-service.

One of the major achievements of the Bologna Process is the creation of a European arena for quality assurance. Furthermore, the usage of ESG has also been one of the successes, though the ESG does not serve as compliance criteria, but is up for further interpretation on different levels. However, there is still a lack of evidence that the vital act of publicising quality assurance reports to the public is occurring, which would also allow potential students to examine the quality of education when making study choices. Quality of education is one of the ground level questions, yet there is much to do in the field in order to build trust and make the quality itself more transparent. In this regard, work on setting up EQAR is vital. This must serve as a foundation for building mutual trust between institutions, governments, employers, teachers and students, by allowing for fair and equal recognition at all levels.

MANDATE OF THE BOLOGNA FRAMEWORK

A further issue that affects action on the ground is that the Bologna documents encompass a much grander scope as to what constitutes and is part of the policy mandate of the education ministers signing them. Many Bologna goals—for example mobility, social dimension and lifelong learning—can only be achieved by combining the work of the national ministries for education, with that of the ministries for social affairs, economic affairs and foreign affairs, as well as institutions, students, staff, and other stakeholders. This communication is vital, as various aspects of national governance and practice remain serious obstacles to achieving these. The issues range from the portability of grants and loans to student services, which is problematic, because different bodies hold responsibility for them than those involved in the BFUG. Another example is the impact of national visa policies on mobility. Almost forty-percent of EHEA students—including those from Ukraine, Russia, the Caucasus, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey face visa barriers when attempting to study in other EHEA countries.

In general, all reforms require resources, but the Bologna framework has little besides expertise to offer. The core problem of the funding gap and in increasing student numbers also indicates the need for Bologna to deal more with general financing issues. However, in the intergovernmental European system, it will be the local voters deciding on the political lifespan of ideas and on higher education as a political priority, which will translate into national budgets—this might be seen as questionable, though this is not so. Hence, the biggest challenge for the Bologna Process will be to remain relevant at the national level, especially on topics such as quality enhancement and student-centred learning, widening access to underrepresented groups, provision of student services, strengthening employability and providing an international learning experience.

LACK OF EVIDENCE BASED POLICIES

With the adoption of a definition, by the BFUG of measuring mobility and also with the setting of the benchmark, Bologna is taking more measurable approaches. In spite of this, there needs to be more effort made in building comprehensive databases, which are usable on the European level, but which also fit the national context. This also necessitates a coherent approach towards defining terms such as ›foreign student‹, ›period of mobility‹, ›socio-economic classes‹ and how disadvantaged groups are defined and so on. There must be an effort made by governments in order to improve the national data collection immediately, at the start of this new Bologna decade, in order to be able to see real progress on fundamental goals by 2020.

The lack of data and the fact that most of the data in existence is qualitative, is also **often used as an excuse** for a lack of commitment towards taking the implementation work on the national and institutional level seriously. This especially concerns the area of the social dimension. Whereas it is acknowledged that effort must be made in order to move towards a joint definition and comparable data, the lack of it to date does not mean that progress shall not be aimed for through the sharing of best-practice by the member states and peer learning.

BOLOGNA PROCESS AND OTHER PROCESSES

The Bologna Process has been noted to have a profound effect on higher education policy in Europe, though there are certainly other major influences. The most notable influences are the Higher Education Modernisation agenda and the European Research Area of the European Union, which are parts of the European Union Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs. The main difference here is of course the geographic scope, as the European Union has twenty-seven Member States (with EU policies closely followed by Switzerland, EEA countries and the candidate states) and the Bologna Process has forty-six participatory

countries. Secondly, the Bologna Process relies completely on the national level and though the European Union also has central funds (which are mostly realised as international cooperation projects) to influence the European policy area, these funds are administered by the European Commission. Another organisation with financial capacity, but on a global scale is the OECD, which also conducts influential studies and makes recommendations. The European Commission also supports the Bologna Process by providing funds for projects and research and with this they have certainly increased their influence over the reform agenda. Examples include ECTS, qualification frameworks, mobility and internationalisation, rankings and so on. Furthermore, there is a difference in the level of involvement and as such democracy. Within the Lisbon strategy and the related elements of the European Research Area and the education and training framework, the stakeholders have much less of a chance to influence policy than within the Bologna Process. As many big universities are focusing more on research activities and expenditure on research has increased, the expenditure on teaching has not. A big drift in policy can also be seen, where more topics from the more Lisbon focused objectives are being included within the Bologna Process.

Regarding student participation in the governance of higher education institutions, there has been some decrease noted by the national students' unions. This has been a result of major challenges posed to universities in the name of accountability, where governance reforms have been focused on increasing the role of external social partners such as employers and corporations, and sometimes even political parties. This is often coupled with the bringing in of a corporate management style, where the academia is reduced to making decisions on strictly academic issues, with financial management done in a much more corporate way. This has been said to increase efficiency and make universities truly accountable for their funds. With this, it is sometimes argued that the universities are also given more autonomy, but this is contradicted by increasing the role of externals in strategic and highest level decision-making. Hand in hand, these new government modes directly alter the direction of universities, as they develop emphasis on real-estate development, tourism and investment. This has a positive effect in terms of diversifying the university landscape of missions, but at the same time this is an official aspect of the Modernisation Agenda of the European Union and some of these aspects directly contradict the Bologna Process goals. Other examples are the EU ERASMUS programme, which has contributed to unbalanced mobility and ERASMUS Mundus, which walks a thin line, sometimes perceived as promoting brain-drain from outside the EU/EEA. Concerning mobility, but also other areas, these two sided policies that take the focus away from achieving balanced intra-EHEA mobility might sabotage the entire Bologna Process.

In terms of looking at the Bologna Process from an external viewpoint or as a student, there is no understanding of these vital differences. This contributes heavily to the more negative views of the Bologna Process. Due to the fact that Bologna is more widely known, it gets labelled for what it is not really responsible for. Bologna is used as scapegoat, so to speak. It is both a scapegoat for the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy goals and also for the implementation of whatever is convenient for national govern-

ments. Controversial issues such as multidimensional transparency tools and non-public funding being included into newer Bologna Process communiqués blur the line where we could have measured achievement in implementing the old ones.

Other areas of complication and overlap, with little common understanding. Are life-long learning and student-centred learning, which offer some tough paradoxes. Life-long learning, should, from a European and government perspective be the prime goal when developing tools like qualification frameworks, diploma supplement, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation. However, on the institutional level, there are often counter-productive views, because life-long learning is simply used to bring more income to the institutions, whilst offering considerably less to these learners for very high fees. There is even little government support, as sometimes governments refuse to remove formal barriers or insist on keeping strict differences between being a full-time student and any kind of other student, in terms of offering support measures or guarantees. Life-long learners are much more often segregated from the academic community and are increasingly viewed as customers looking to enhance their skills, rather than as students, seeking knowledge and personal development or wanting to contribute to the academic community. Thus, with this concept of life-long learning we face the need to break through additional social barriers, whereas life-long learning with in the students' vision of it should be a part of the solution already. There is simply no common understanding and agreement of how life-long learning attitudes could change societies and truly open up academic learning possibilities to all citizens.

Furthermore, due to the intensifying focus on outcome based indicators and financing systems (which are usually focused on research, because this is more easily translated into numbers and thus can be measured more easily by the media) it is hardly possible to make the paradigm shift from teacher to student-centred education a reality. For a meaningful and thorough change to occur, a higher level of resource needs to be committed, but attention also needs to be given to education and teaching. If we are to foster education systems that truly focus on the student, we have to keep in mind that this is likely to create a much higher workload than has been committed within traditional courses and academic support structures. In this view, the notion of high-quality education and the organisation of teaching and learning in institutions should also be re-evaluated. A possible way forward would be to revise the European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance, so that they encompass more aspects of and necessities for student-centred learning and student support services, including social standards. However, this of course is a huge challenge, as even though the ESG have proven useful when it comes to supporting quality culture and enhancing student participation in it, it can still be said they are too new to be familiar to all parties concerned and still contain a high level of variety and difference in approach.

GOVERNANCE AND STEERING OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

In relation to the challenge mentioned above, regarding the relevance of the Bologna Process and the financial limitations, the governance of such a far-reaching process is a matter of concern. The process has evolved through a rather unique form of intergovernmental dynamic cooperation between various European countries. The fact that the Bologna Process has been constantly growing in terms of both action lines and member states has made the need for a clearer, more transparent governance mode of the process much stronger. Whilst the voluntary and dynamic cooperation manner of the Bologna Process has been an important precondition for its success, it can be said that transparent, democratic and commonly agreed upon procedures are needed in order to assure the long-term equal involvement and commitment of the members and the consultative members. In this regard, the role of the chairs and the co-chairs of the BFUG should be clarified through the creation of a working procedures document to be adopted by the BFUG itself. On a similar note, there is a need for a clearer distinction between the BFUG and the BFUG Board, in order to enhance the steering of the process because for consultative members who belong to both, it has been uncertain.

A vital role within the steering of the Bologna Process is also played by the hosting country of the approaching ministerial summit, which is also providing the secretariat. As with any intergovernmental cooperation, the administration of it is a very considerable task in order to sustain the joint work of forty-six countries. The countries taking up this responsibility make a significant commitment to pushing the process further, which should be welcomed. However, in order to sustain this growing process and also to make the handover to respective next hosting countries smoother, there is a need for agreed guidelines on the work of the secretariat. This is especially the case given that there has been a tendency towards a more political role for the hosting country in their secretariat function, whereas the role of this more organisational chair should be to maintain the sustainability of the process in a neutral way. For the next decade it should be considered whether an improvement of the secretariat arrangements might be more appropriate and also sustainable.

ESU welcomes that from 2010, a permanent website of the European Higher Education Area will be set up and asserts that there should be an effort made to centralise, and make public in an adequate manner, the Bologna Process archives from its beginning in 1998/1999.

INTRINSIC GOALS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

When looking at the major challenges ahead, a blurry pattern of uncertainty between the different policy making arenas and levels can be seen. As countries seem to approach different action lines with different view-points, and in the context of setting their own preferred finish lines (which sometimes

can also be understandable coming from their different backgrounds), one may enquire as to whether EHEA is merely about increasing the attractiveness of individual countries, or there is still the aim of achieving a European dimension that makes the continent's HE systems beneficial for its academic communities and societies as a whole. There still needs to be a fundamental shift towards countries identifying themselves with pan-European goals and with a single educational, but also cultural area. Thus, it is the role of the stakeholders to keep looking into the past and to indicate the problem areas, where not nearly enough action has been taken to reach the original goals and to remind the relevant parties that shortcuts to achieve these should not be taken. If Bologna were to become too unpopular or to fail in producing positive results, it is hard to imagine any other process which could take its place in the near future. Much has been invested and it would simply be foolish to throw this to the perils of history. The Bologna Process indeed has not finished, and keeps developing, but learning from the past, we can see where the root causes for the challenges lie and this should serve us as a hint of what should be the next steps.

1.3   REFERENCES

The Bologna Declaration 1999: *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education.*

A   ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Academic Cooperation Association
AHELO	Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
BAFL	Bologna at the Finish Line
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
BWSE	Bologna With Student Eyes
CEEPUS	Central European Exchange Program for University Studies
CHEPS	Center for Higher Education Policy Studies
CoE	Council of Europe
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accreditation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EI	Education International
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EP	European Parliament
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
EQF/EQF-LLL	European Qualifications Framework for life-long learning
ERASMUS Programme	European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ESGs	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESN	Erasmus Student Network
ESU	European Students' Union
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
EUROSTAT	Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union situated in Luxembourg. Its task is to provide the European Union with statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions.
EUROSTUDENT	The EUROSTUDENT project collates comparable data on the social and economic conditions of student life in Europe
EURYDICE	The Eurydice Network provides information on and analysis of European education systems and policies. It consists of 35 national units based in all 31 countries participating in the EU's life-long learning programme (EU Member States, EEA countries and Turkey)

and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

NESSIE	BFUG Expert Network on Student Support
NUS	National Union of Students
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development
(N)QF	(National) Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UOE	UNESCO-UIS/OECD/EUROSTAT joint data collection on statistics of education

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