

Implementing the Bologna Process: the follow-up

The Bologna Declaration marked the launch of the Bologna Process, which led to the formation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010. The process now brings together 47 European countries in a common effort to make their higher education systems compatible and comparable. Participants face the challenge of making different systems more easily recognisable whilst respecting academic freedom and autonomy, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity.

Equivalence and recognition

In [1999](#), Ministers declared their ambition to reinvigorate European higher education to make it more competitive and attractive globally. This was to be achieved by facilitating student and staff [mobility](#) to increase contacts between higher education institutions and open up to the [world](#). The European Commission and [education ministers](#), together with stakeholders, became involved in a [process](#) to establish common structures that help institutions and individuals understand what others do. This proved [controversial](#) as critics feared the effects of lowering standards and the pre-eminence of market concerns.

A common degrees structure, initially a [two-cycle model](#), was chosen to distinguish between undergraduate and graduate degrees. This was extended to a third level, the doctorate, to [link education with research](#). Recognition of [short cycles](#) was considered to improve intakes of under-represented groups, completion rates and add relevance to labour market needs. The [European Qualifications Framework](#) was developed using UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). As yet, however, not all EHEA countries have [National Qualifications Frameworks](#) in place, and their role in increasing transparency and promoting common recognition is still limited even if it is growing. Universities are also expected to issue a [Diploma Supplement](#) in a widely known European language but this is not widespread.

Another important development was a standardised system of credits, known as [ECTS](#) (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). This system defines credits in terms of learning outcomes and a workload quantified in hours. Credits add up to meet the requirements of a degree and are transferable to other institutions in the EHEA. A parallel system was set up for vocational education and training, the [ECVET](#), whilst implementation of validation arrangements for [non-formal](#) (evening classes, clubs) and informal (voluntary work) learning is targeted for 2018.

Remaining concerns

Since **recognition of qualifications** or credits of study is the prerogative of universities, quality assurance is needed to create transparency. The [agreed model](#) is rigorous internal quality assurance verified by [external agencies](#). Currently, efforts to improve quality assurance are focused on promoting [learning outcomes](#) as a criterion for evaluation. They also seek more even implementation of agreements in different countries. Enhancing **employability** with mobility, giving young people more options in higher education and, later, jobs was a priority and is now even more pertinent. However, the obstacles are also administrative and financial. Mobility is facilitated if students maintain their [grants](#) and staff their statutory rights (related to working conditions). Another related social issue is access for **under-represented groups**. Research indicates that individuals from these groups tend to follow [indirect educational paths](#). [Council](#) recognised the need for the Bologna Process to pursue efforts to provide equal opportunities irrespective of background.

Ministers meet again in May 2015 in Yerevan but observers note [mixed success](#), [dwindling interest](#) and lack of visibility. At the same time a [report](#) from the EP Committee on Culture and Education (rapporteur Krystyna Łybacka, S&D, Poland) points to the links between the Bologna Process, the revision of the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#) and the implementation of the [Juncker Investment Plan](#). Apart from Member State involvement at national level, the EU contributes to the Bologna priorities through [Erasmus+](#).