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**THE BOLOGNA PROCESS:  
STOCKTAKING AND  
PROSPECTS**

**NOTE**





**DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES  
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES**

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

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NOTE

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education

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DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES  
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

## THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: STOCKTAKING AND PROSPECTS

### NOTE

#### Abstract

The Bologna Process has led to fundamental changes in higher education across Europe. The launch of the EHEA in 2010 marked an important milestone on the way to an open area of higher learning with greater compatibility and comparability as well as increased international attractiveness and competitiveness of the European higher education systems. Good progress has been made in many fields, but much remains to be done in order to ensure full achievement of all Bologna goals in the next decade.



## CONTENTS

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS SINCE 1998: A SHORT OVERVIEW</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. IMPLEMENTING THE BOLOGNA REFORMS: MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Overall performance of Bologna countries: analysis of strengths and weaknesses	17
2.2 Thematic status reports on the main achievements and challenges in important action lines of the Bologna Process	19
2.2.1 Degree and Curriculum Reforms	19
2.2.2 Mobility	20
2.2.3 Recognition of Qualifications and Lifelong Learning	23
2.2.4 Employability	25
2.2.5 Social Dimension	26
2.2.6 Quality Assurance	28
2.2.7 Qualifications Frameworks	30
2.2.8 Linking EHEA and ERA	31
2.2.9 External Dimension	32
<b>3. CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>ANNEX</b>	<b>39</b>



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BA** Bachelor (used as general term for the first degree)
- BFUG** Bologna Follow - Up Group
- CEPES** Centre Européene pour l'enseignement superior
- CoE** Council of Europe
- DS** Diploma Supplement
- ECTS** European Credit Transfer System
- EHEA** European Higher Education Area
- ENQA** European Network for Quality Assurance
- EP** European Parliament
- EQAR** European Quality Assurance Register
- EQF LLL** European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
- ERA** European Research Area
- ESG** European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
- ESU** The European Students' Union
- ISCED** International Standard Classification of Education
- LLL** Lifelong learning
- LRC** Lisbon Recognition Convention
- MA** Master (used as general term for the second degree)
- NQF** National Qualifications Framework
- QA** Quality Assurance
- QF EHEA** Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area
- RPL** Recognition of prior learning



## LIST OF FIGURES

**MAP 1**

Bologna structure models most commonly implemented, 2009/10

39

**TABLE 1**

Dominant practice in the allocation of credits

40

**MAP 2**

Stage of National Qualifications Framework development compatible with  
the QF EHEA, 2009/10

41



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This note seeks to inform the European Parliament (EP) on the implementation status and prospects of the Bologna Process. Following the executive summary, which includes our recommendations, part 1 gives a general overview of the topics, developments and trends within the Bologna Process since 1998. Part 2 provides a progress report on the Bologna reforms and identifies achievements and future challenges in individual Bologna areas. Part 3 outlines the most important conclusions. The note is based on the most recent Bologna evaluations (2009 and 2010) and the authors' rich experience in Bologna-related matters.

In only a decade, the intergovernmental Bologna Process has, together with other modernisation agendas at EU and national level, led to a "fundamental and dramatic change in higher education" in Europe and attracted significant attention in other parts of the world. The Bologna reforms – which have, since their inception, been supported by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council within the framework of their responsibilities – were to achieve "greater compatibility and comparability" of higher education systems inside Europe and strengthen the global "attractiveness and competitiveness" of European higher education (Bologna Declaration 1999). To accomplish this, a number of goals and action lines were set to be achieved by 2010. 47 out of 50 signatories of the European Cultural Convention have meanwhile joined the Process. In 2010, the EHEA was launched and substantial progress towards the Bologna targets noted. But evaluations show that further effort is needed in various areas for the reforms to be fully completed, explaining why Ministers set 2020 as the new completion deadline of the Bologna Process.

Good progress was made in the implementation of the Bologna reforms in the past decade, particularly regarding the "architectural elements", but implementation in the signatory countries took place at varying speeds, and no country has fully completed implementation. In particular, target achievement at institutional level leaves room for improvement and the Bologna reforms are not yet fully accepted by institutions and students. This might be due to an overly "instrumental" rather than "holistic" implementation approach, and to inadequate communication of the Bologna objectives to higher education institutions and students. In Budapest/Vienna 2010, the Ministers therefore undertook to better involve these stakeholders in the future.

Fears (or hopes) that the reforms would lead to a "harmonisation" of European higher education proved unfounded. Greater comparability and convergence in certain areas (e.g. the degree architecture) came about in parallel with new divergences due to the diversity of the European higher education landscape and the differing profiles of individual higher education institutions (e.g. regarding the duration of the first two cycles) and different interpretations and practical implementation of elements of the reform (e.g. ECTS, learning outcomes).

Target achievement and future challenges also differ greatly between individual elements. The two-cycle **degree system** is now the structuring principle in all countries, but some disciplines (e.g. medicine) are not yet integrated and enrolment numbers in the new degrees are still low in some countries. Students criticise that access to the second cycle is often conditional on additional requirements. The results of the **curriculum reform** are more mixed. ECTS, learning outcomes and the Diploma Supplement are still insufficiently related to each other, and their implementation is often superficial and inconsistent across Europe. Thorough modularisation of curricula is a reality only in a minority of EHEA countries. Student-centred teaching and learning is progressing, but in no country completed, and implementation varies greatly between higher education institutions.

Excellent progress was made in **quality assurance** (QA). The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) have considerably enhanced European level quality assurance. QA systems now exist in almost all countries, though not everywhere aligned to the ESG. Only a few QA agencies have so far registered with EQAR and involvement of institutions and stakeholders (including students) must still grow. Few countries have developed a **national qualifications framework (NQF)** fully compatible with the EHEA-wide framework of qualifications. Given their importance for transparency, recognition, mobility and lifelong learning, NQFs must now be implemented, preferably by 2012, with particular attention given to the use of learning outcomes.

Insufficient **recognition** persists. Recognition instruments like ECTS and the Diploma Supplement are increasingly used in Europe, though their impact is hampered by different understandings and inconsistent implementation between countries and institutions (and even departments). Recognition is also still rarely based on learning outcomes. The Lisbon Recognition Convention has been ratified by almost all EHEA countries, but there is not yet a proper understanding of its "substantial differences" concept. The original aim to enhance the **mobility** of students (and staff) was confirmed by the 20% target set in 2010. Measurement of success is complicated by the (poor) quality of available data, but it appears that fears about a negative Bologna impact on mobility were unfounded, though mobility is very unevenly developed in the EHEA. Erasmus participation almost doubled in ten years. Some countries appear to be already close to or beyond the 20% mobility target. The inflow of degree-seeking students from non-EHEA countries grew tremendously. But obstacles to mobility persist, in areas such as recognition, administrative procedures (visas, work permits, etc) and funding, which is viewed as a major mobility deterrent for students from less wealthy backgrounds. "Mobility windows" are not yet common.

Due to a lack of precise indicators and scant monitoring, there is little solid information on achievements with regard to the **social dimension** and, in particular, higher education participation of socially and otherwise disadvantaged population groups. All EHEA countries pursue policies of participative equity, but few appear to have developed comprehensive strategies. Despite progress in participation from lower socio-economic backgrounds, there is still a considerable "social filter" in the EHEA. The evidence base on the **employability of graduates** and notably the labour market acceptance of the Bachelor degree is still not strong. Country-based studies show a good absorption of first-cycle students, especially from "professional Bachelors", but most universities question the Bachelor as a labour-market qualifying degree, which undermines its credibility. Cooperation with employers over curricula is underway, though apparently not growing over time.

Attempts at **linking the EHEA with the European Research Area** through the introduction of more structured doctoral programmes and graduate schools have progressed, also in the form of collaborative doctoral programmes (jointly offered by universities and enterprises) and joint European doctorates. But doctoral education remains diverse and the status of doctoral candidates varies greatly across the EHEA. The **external dimension** of the EHEA is turning out to be a success. The inflow of non-EHEA students into the EHEA swelled remarkably in the past decade, and the reforms have been received positively around the world. An external strategy was adopted (2007) and two Bologna Policy Forums were held in 2009 and 2010. Deficits remain however in the global promotion of the EHEA towards third-country students.

## Recommendations

1. The EP should call on all stakeholders to **keep the momentum** of the Bologna Process going and create a truly attractive and competitive EHEA. **Consolidating and completing** the existing Bologna action lines must be the first priority for the next decade. The processes of **informing and including** all stakeholders (including students) have to be further expanded and better funded in order to improve acceptance of the reforms. Also measures should be taken to make the achievements and advantages of the Bologna reforms and the support given by the EU to the Process better known to a broader public (e.g. public hearings of the EP, informational leaflets and events provided by the EP's information offices).
2. The evaluation of reform progress is hampered in some areas (e.g. social dimension, employability) by a lack of precise targets. The EP should demand that **quantitative targets**, inclusive of clearly defined **indicators**, be developed in all areas and **data collection systems** put in place in order to measure target achievement. Target achievement should be monitored at regular intervals (every two years), by independent evaluators not involved in the governance of the Bologna Process.
3. Signatory countries should integrate still missing subject areas into the **two-cycle degree system** and ensure that students completing one Bologna cycle have reasonable access to the next. **Curriculum reform must advance** by making higher education institutions describe their curricula through learning outcomes and ECTS, and by further developing the student-centred approach. In addition, the EU should promote the development of truly European curricula (e.g. European studies, European law) and joint study programmes by expanding its funding schemes such as Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus. In order to monitor labour-market access (**employability**) of Bologna-degree graduates, a Europe-wide graduate survey should regularly be conducted; further study and employment trajectories following the Bachelor degree should also be tracked. Furthermore, the EP should once again encourage the dialogue and collaboration between the world of work and higher education to jointly develop curricula, including work placements. In order to strengthen the third cycle and the link to the ERA, the EP should advocate joint doctoral schools and programmes by means of increased funding in the next generation of EU education and research programmes. The EP should continue to push for the creation of a European Industrial PhD scheme, which it had already advocated in 2009.
4. Continued efforts are required to make **mobility** the real "hallmark" of the EHEA. The EP should step up its support for mobility by increasing the financial envelope for the next phase of EU programmes and widening the geographical scope of the programmes to the entire EHEA. Signatory countries must develop mobility promotion strategies and remove obstacles to mobility (e.g. visas, portability of grants, loans and pensions). Institutions must develop mobility-friendly curricula (e.g. mobility windows, joint programmes) and improve recognition.
5. Institutions should be given support to improve **recognition and credit transfer** by implementing ECTS, learning outcomes, the DS and the LRC in a comparable and correct way across Europe (e.g. with a European Users' Guide for Recognition and European training seminars funded by the Commission). Signatory countries must ensure full and comparable introduction of **National Qualifications Frameworks** in accordance with the QF EHEA that is urgently needed to facilitate mobility, recognition and lifelong learning.

6. In order to further progress on **quality assurance** systems, the EP should urge Member States and institutions to fully implement QA systems in accordance with the ESG. QA agencies and networks must intensify cooperation and dialogue on QA with other parts of the world and develop a common understanding of QA principles. The EP should renew its invitation to the Commission to continue its support for activities in the field of QA and to present progress reports on the development of QA systems at national and European level.
7. In order to strengthen the **external dimension** of the EHEA and to promote Europe as a study destination worldwide, the EP could encourage global higher education promotion activities, particularly joint European efforts, and invite the Commission to support institutional and national promotion through a joint European promotion campaign.

## 1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS SINCE 1998: A SHORT OVERVIEW

### KEY FINDINGS

- Since its inception in 1999 the inter-governmental Bologna Process has deeply influenced European higher education and together with other agendas led to fundamental changes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- 47 European countries have meanwhile committed to the Bologna aims. Other regions of the world show great interest in the Bologna model.
- The evaluation reports demonstrate good progress in many Bologna action lines. However, they also clearly indicate that the aims of the process are by no means all fully achieved. The year 2020 was proposed by the European Education Ministers as the new target for completing the reforms.

In March 2010, the European Ministers responsible for higher education met in Budapest and Vienna to launch the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as envisaged in the Bologna Declaration of 1999. This marked an important milestone in the Bologna Process, the roots of which go back to the Sorbonne Declaration of the Education Ministers for Germany, France, the UK and Italy of 1998, and which has in the last decade together with other major developments in internationalisation and European and national policies increased the Europe-wide dialogue on higher education and contributed to comprehensive and profound changes to Europe's higher education system. From 1998 to 2010, the reform efforts were discussed at a political level in eight ministerial conferences in total; new elements were added and the progress of their implementation reviewed. In addition to the national ministries responsible for higher education, stakeholders involved in designing the process included the European Commission, a number of consultative members such as the Council of Europe, CEPES (Centre Européen pour l'enseignement supérieur), European higher education and student associations and the European representations of the social partners. Important issues in creating an "open area of higher learning" are the achievement of greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education within Europe (internal dimension) and outwardly (external dimension) strengthening the international attractiveness and competitiveness of the European system of higher education (Bologna Declaration 1999). In order to accomplish this, a number of operational goals and action lines were defined that were to be achieved by 2010, for example the adoption of a system based on three main cycles (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral cycle) with easily readable and comparable degrees, the establishment of a common system of credits (e.g. ECTS) in order that students' qualifications may be easily transferable throughout Europe, the promotion of student and staff mobility and of European co-operation in quality assurance as well as the reinforcement of the social dimension. Moreover, special emphasis is being put on student-centred learning and teaching. Out of 50 signatory states of the European Cultural Convention, 47 have meanwhile committed to these internationally agreed aims.

The European convergence process in higher education has attracted significant worldwide interest and recognition, and is occasionally even acknowledged as a role model for other regions of the world: "The core features of the Bologna Process have sufficient momentum

to become the dominant global higher education model within the next two decades" (Adelman 2009, p. viii). The Ministers have responded to the worldwide interest in the Bologna Process and their own desire to engage in systematic dialogue with other parts of the world by creating the Bologna Policy Forum, joint meetings with non-EHEA ministerial colleagues. Two such meetings have been held since 2009.

On the occasion of the Bologna Anniversary Conference 2010 in Budapest/Vienna and the Bologna Ministerial Conference 2009 in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, the Ministers made an interim assessment of the implementation of the reform and the achievement of the specified aims, for which various evaluation and analysis reports provided a significant basis. In the case of the Leuven/Louvain conference this was mainly the Bologna Process Stocktaking Report (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009), which analysed the national reports on the implementation status of the reforms in the various Bologna signatory states and evaluated the individual countries with regard to their progress in important areas of the Bologna Process. In addition, the views of students (ESU 2009) and, on the occasion of their anniversary meeting in 2010, the results of an independent assessment (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010), as well as further external analyses and evaluations, were submitted to the Ministers (e.g. Sursock & Smidt 2010; EACEA/Eurydice 2010; Ministry of Science and Research Austria & Ministry of Education and Culture Hungary 2010; ESU 2010). As Kazakhstan became a Bologna member only in 2010, the stocktaking and evaluation reports cover 46 countries or sometimes 48 higher education systems (including Dutch and French speaking communities of Belgium as well as UK-EWNI and UK-Scotland).

The reports clearly show that the reform process has achieved significant changes in the European higher education landscape and the implementation of the defined goals is well underway in many countries. However, "even 'high-achieving' countries that joined from the beginning need to give further attention to some action areas" (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 108). The evaluation reports also indicate that the breadth and depth of implementation in the various countries differs significantly (e.g. Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 6) and an "EHEA of different speeds of implementation and varying levels of commitment" (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 107) has developed. This is however not surprising given that not all countries joined at the same time and the initial conditions in the countries varied. Some reports also point out significant failings in introducing the reforms, which ultimately aroused criticism and opposition from a number of higher education institutions and students. The occasionally too rapid, very formal and inflexible implementation of the various Bologna instruments has "sometimes led to a fragmented and instrumental view of education" (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 9) at some higher education institutions, caused high administrative workloads for teaching staff, and negatively affected "studyability" and possibilities for mobility among students (ESU 2010, p. 1). Linking it to global challenges in internationalising higher education institutions, to other European policy agendas and national reforms unrelated to Bologna has also occasionally put excessive strain on the Bologna Process. This, in some cases, explains "why Bologna is at the same time respected, blamed, loved and hated by academic communities and governments alike" (*ibid.*). Moreover, the Bologna aims formulated at a political level were not always adequately communicated, and the affected stakeholders (in particular in the higher education institutions) were insufficiently involved in the process. The Ministers responded positively to this criticism and undertook "to improve communication on and understanding of the Bologna Process among all stakeholders and society as a whole" in their Budapest/Vienna Declaration. They also committed "to working towards a more effective inclusion of higher education staff and students in implementation and further development of the EHEA" (Budapest/Vienna Declaration

2010), thereby underlining the great importance of consulting all stakeholders, a point that had previously been emphasised by the EP (European Parliament 2008, p. 2).

Based on the evaluation reports, which clearly indicate that the aims of the process are by no means all fully achieved, it was apparent to the Ministers that "the full and proper implementation of these objectives at European, national and institutional level will require increased momentum and commitment beyond 2010" (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009). The year 2020 was proposed as the new target for completing the reforms. The social dimension of higher education; lifelong learning; employability; student-centred learning and teaching; the combination of education, research and innovation; international openness; mobility of students, early stage researchers and staff; improved and enhanced data collection; development of multidimensional transparency tools; and the need for sufficient funding were defined as thematic priorities for the coming decade, a period that will also present major challenges in terms of demography and globalisation. Many of these priorities are fully in line with European policies and programmes. As such, the EU, which has been supporting the intergovernmental Bologna Process since its inception, can contribute significantly to the completion of the reforms by 2020 within the framework of its responsibility (European Commission 2010a, European Parliament 2009 and 2008).



## 2. IMPLEMENTING THE BOLOGNA REFORMS: MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

### KEY FINDINGS

- All countries are committed to the Bologna reforms but the degree of target achievement and the speed of implementation in the individual countries vary widely.
- Some action lines have already been largely implemented by all countries (e.g. two-cycle system, quality assurance), while others will require still some time yet (e.g. national qualifications frameworks). Due to a lack of reliable data it is difficult to make a clear statement on developments in certain areas (e.g. social dimension).

### 2.1. Overall performance of Bologna countries: analysis of strengths and weaknesses

In its stocktaking scorecards, the Bologna Stocktaking Report uses a traffic light system (green – light green – yellow – orange – red) to give an overview of the current degree of implementation of the Bologna Process in the signatory states. On the basis of the countries' national reports, the scorecards examine the extent to which targets have been achieved in the "degree system", "quality assurance" and "recognition" action lines, to which a total of ten indicators are assigned (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 122). The Stocktaking Report only covers developments until the end of 2008; therefore the following discussion also considers progress made after this point in time insofar as the authors of this note are aware of such information through more recent sources.

The summary scorecard for all countries clearly shows that the reforms are being implemented at varying speeds within the EHEA and a number of targets will only be achieved after 2010. However, the scorecard also indicates that all countries are committed to the reforms and "some countries have considerably improved their scores" since 2007. A total of 30 Bologna countries have implemented the three previously mentioned action lines or are currently in the process of doing so. 16 countries have done no work on at least one field of the three action lines and therefore scored "red". Eight countries (half of them acceded to the Bologna Process at an early stage) even scored "red" in two or more fields. Four countries (Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden), all of which are among the initial signatories of the Bologna Declaration, have progressed very far in their implementation and scored "green" or "light green" in all categories. Only UK-Scotland is certified to have fully achieved the targets in all categories.

Implementation of the first and second cycle is largely developing positively. Only one country still has a student enrolment rate in the two-cycle **degree system** of under 25%. The two-cycle structure itself has been introduced by all countries; this target has therefore been fully achieved, as the Independent Assessment states (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 7). However, some subject areas are still exempted from the degree reform and the introduction of the two cycles has not resulted in a European standard for the length of first and second degrees; rather, it has led to a new diversity which may give rise to issues regarding student mobility and the development of joint degree programmes. "Access to the next cycle" has made good progress in all countries (no "red"

or “orange”), but Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009, p. 34) only considered in the scorecard whether there were obstacles to access in legislation. The introduction of the national qualifications frameworks still needs some time. So far, only eight countries have self-certified national qualifications frameworks relating to the overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA. The Ministers have therefore pushed back the original deadline for achieving this target from 2010 to 2012.

The greatest progress was made in the field of **quality assurance**: “All countries but one apply internal and external quality assurance on a system-wide scale” (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 36). A similar observation was made by Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009, p. 122), especially for external QA. However, only 16 countries have so far linked their QA systems to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

**Recognition** of credits and degrees is developing more slowly than expected in some areas and needs further attention. Compliance of national legislation with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is well underway. Meanwhile, the LRC is effective in 46 Bologna countries (including Kazakhstan), as three additional countries (Belgium, Italy, Spain) ratified the Convention after the scorecard was compiled. A common European understanding of the LRC is however still lacking. The use of the recognition and transparency tools ECTS and Diploma Supplement (DS) needs to be improved. Although almost all Bologna countries have introduced ECTS or have ECTS-compatible systems, some apply it in very different ways or make no link between credits and learning outcomes. As regards the DS, the results so far are unsatisfactory; only 30 countries have fulfilled the requirement of issuing the DS to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language. The situation regarding the recognition of prior learning, which is very important for widening access to and increasing participation in higher education, is even worse. Only 16 countries have defined processes at national level “to assess prior learning as a basis for access to higher education” (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 62).

Two important areas of the Bologna Process, **student and staff mobility** and the **social dimension**, are not recorded in the Bologna scorecard because the national reports contain insufficient data or too few comparable statements on the subject. The Stocktaking Report therefore cannot contribute to the question of whether the Bologna reforms in the individual countries have led to an increase in mobility or, perhaps to the contrary, even impediments. In examining mobility in the EHEA and within the EHEA since the Bologna Declaration of 1999 the Independent Assessment concludes that mobility towards the EHEA has increased substantially and student mobility within the EHEA has not increased substantially. In either case, however, there is no proof whatsoever of a causal link to the Bologna Process. In the social dimension area Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009, p. 15) state that national approaches “are not yet successfully integrated with qualifications frameworks, strategies for lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning, flexible learning paths and support for mobility”. Only 22 countries have a national action plan for social dimension. Not least for this reason, students in particular see a great need for action in this area (ESU 2010, p. 8).

## 2.2. Thematic status reports on the main achievements and challenges in important action lines of the Bologna Process

### 2.2.1. Degree and Curriculum Reforms

#### *History*

The two-cycle degree structure had already been mentioned by the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) and became a central action line of the Bologna Process. The Bologna Declaration (1999) stated that EHEA countries should adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees and implement a system based essentially on two main cycles (undergraduate and graduate). In Berlin (2003), doctoral studies were included as the third cycle in the degree structure. The Bergen Communiqué (2005) specified the length of degrees in terms of ECTS within the QF EHEA. Accordingly, the first degree typically includes 180 to 240 credits and the second degree 90 to 120 credits, with a minimum of 60 credits. A similar standardisation is not foreseen for the doctoral degree. Also degree titles were not specified in detail. Whereas the term "Master" does appear in the Bologna Declaration the term "Bachelor" does not (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 14).

#### *Achievements and future challenges*

All evaluation reports confirm the comprehensive introduction of the **two-cycle degree structure**. The Stocktaking Report uses the proportion of BA and MA students to all students of a higher education system to indicate how far the implementation of the two-cycle system has progressed in the individual countries. According to Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009), the introduction of the two main cycles is well advanced in 41 countries. In these countries, between 70% and 100% of all students are working towards a BA or MA degree. Four countries state that between 50% and 69% of all students are enrolled in one of the two main cycles. In a further four countries, including two large ones, fewer than half of all students or fewer than a quarter are studying for a BA or MA degree. Despite many achievements the introduction of the two-cycle system must be advanced further, particularly in those countries where less than half of all students pursue a BA or MA degree and in those where old and new degrees still exist in parallel. In addition, it is crucial to speed up the introduction of two-cycle degrees in those disciplines that are currently still excluded from the degree structure reform. 37 higher education systems exclude various disciplines from the degree structure reform (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 17). In the majority of countries this applies to subjects in the field of medicine; in a small number of countries there are also exceptions for architecture, law, engineering sciences, theology, arts, and for teacher education.

As the duration of the two cycles is not strictly regulated, different models have developed within the two main cycles based on the amount of time and ECTS credits required. Three main models can be identified: The two-cycle degree system awarding 180 + 120 ECTS credits (3+2 years of study) is applied in 19 countries and is the most widespread model. The 240 + 120 ECTS credits model (4 + 2 years of study) is applied in six, and the 240 + 60/90 ECTS credits two-cycle degree system (4 + 1/1.5 years of study) in four academic systems (see Annex fig. 1). In the other academic systems no model can be identified that is applied across the board (EACEA/Eurydice 2010, p. 19). In order to avoid further patchwork regarding the design of study cycles, it is necessary to achieve more convergence in terms of ECTS credit assignment. Sursock & Smidt (2010) suggest that a uniform concept for assigning ECTS credits should first be developed and agreed at a national level, for example through the rectors' conferences (*ibid.*, p. 59).

Permeability between the individual study cycles has highly increased in 92% of countries, e.g. all BA degrees give access to several MA programmes and all MA degrees give access to at least one doctoral programme (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 33). In four countries, some BA or MA degrees (fewer than 25%) do not automatically entitle the holder to apply for an MA or doctoral programme. A closer look however shows that students in the higher education systems scored in the green range must meet a wide range of other conditions in order to be admitted to the next higher study phase. In approximately half of these countries all students must take entrance examinations; in 25% of countries this applies mainly to students aiming for an academically oriented MA degree after completing a professional or vocational first degree. Students who have completed a "short bachelor" and wish to study for an MA degree must take additional courses or demonstrate professional experience. The majority of countries declare that in principle all MA degrees make the holder eligible for doctoral studies. In countries where two kinds of higher education institutions exist, students with professional or vocational degrees must meet additional requirements (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 47). In order to increase permeability between the individual study cycles, the admission requirements for entering the next higher study cycle must be made more transparent. This is especially important for those students who hold a professional or vocational first degree and wish to complete an academic MA degree (ESU 2010, p. 10). Further flexible pathways between sub-Bachelor and Bachelor education are necessary.

For more details on the third Bologna cycle (doctoral degree), see 2.2.8.

**Curriculum reform** includes the use of ECTS and DS based on learning outcomes, the modularisation of curricula and student-centred teaching and learning. For details on ECTS and the DS see 2.2.3. As regards the modularisation of study programmes Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009) detect significant progress, which is in accordance with the findings of Sursock & Smidt (2010). However, complete modularisation has not taken place in most of the countries. According to CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC (2010, p. 27), in only 13 systems have 90% or more of study programmes been modularised. In seven countries modularisation has not taken place at all. What is more serious however is that there seems to be no common understanding of the term "modularisation" across Europe. Thus a common concept for modularised degree programmes is essential (*ibid.*) and must be linked to student-centred teaching and learning, which shows positive signs of ongoing progress, but still needs further development.

Further attention needs to be paid to the acceptance of first-cycle graduates on the labour market. Employers have to review their employment policies and practices, with a view to facilitating BA students' entry into the labour market. Where significant problems exist regarding the recognition of BA degrees as professionally qualifying degrees, admission requirements for MA degree programmes should be adapted until the BA is more widely recognised in the world of work (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 45).

## 2.2.2. Mobility

### **History**

International student (and, to a lesser extent, staff) mobility was a key European concern already in pre-Bologna times. From the mid-1980s onwards, the EU started a whole series of mobility schemes, and notably its flagship programme Erasmus. The Union's commitment has not faltered over time, as underlined by such recent initiatives as the Green Paper on learning mobility (European Commission 2009a) and "Youth on the move" (European Commission 2010b).

Mobility figured centrally in the original Bologna Declaration, as one of the six operational objectives, and it was also a major motivation behind other objectives, such as the new degree structure and the credit point system. Over the lifetime of the process, the centrality of student mobility has grown even further. The promotion of mobility and the removal of mobility obstacles were key issues in all Ministerial Communiqués since 2001. The Communiqué of the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Meeting (2009) refers to mobility as "the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area" and sets the target that, by 2020, "at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad". In slight contrast to the high political attention paid to student mobility, the exact sort of mobility to be achieved has never been clearly defined. The assessment of ESU (ESU 2010, p. 16) that mobility is "perhaps one of the most blurred action lines of the process" is an overstatement, but in tendency correct. The Bologna evaluation rightly stresses that the central Bologna documents (Ministerial Communiqués) deal with mobility in very general terms (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 65). They rarely make important differentiations, for example by mobility directions (inbound vs. outbound), type (degree mobility vs. temporary mobility), geographical scope (intra-EHEA vs. worldwide) and minimum duration, amongst others.

Though implicitly, most Communiqués refer to outbound temporary mobility, as testified by the frequent references to EU mobility programmes. Inbound degree mobility is also a major concern (particularly in the context of the goal to increase the EHEA's global attractiveness), though less frequently cited. The 20% target of the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué clearly refers to outbound mobility. It leaves it open if only temporary mobility is to be counted or also degree mobility. Importantly, it does not specify a minimum duration. The temptation to include in the count also very short stays of perhaps just a week is high, since governments are eager to be able to reach the target. We find that this would be detrimental to the original intention.

### ***Achievements and future challenges***

The Bologna Process pursues a double mobility objective. Ultimately, it seeks to increase the number of internationally mobile students. In order to achieve this objective, it aims at reducing mobility obstacles (of various sorts) and at enhancing mobility incentives. In our analysis of progress made and remaining problems, we will focus on these two aspects.

Actions to address **mobility obstacles** were first included in the Bologna "stocktaking exercise" in 2007, which enabled a more in-depth qualitative analysis of mobility and mobility-enhancing measures. The stocktaking exercise, just like the assessment reports of 2010, confirm that significant progress was made in overcoming mobility obstacles since 1999, in critical areas such as recognition (through wider implementation of the LRC, EU directives, and widespread use of ECTS), funding (increasing numbers of countries providing portable grants and loans), and (simplified) legal and administrative procedures. But many challenges remain, as a recent report by ESU (2010) points out. Lack of funding, particularly for students from less favoured backgrounds, continues to be perceived as a major mobility impediment. The ESU report asks for the introduction of full portability of grants and loans, and an EHEA wide mobility fund. According to the most recent EUROSTUDENT report, 57% of all student respondents view financial problems as the biggest mobility obstacle (Orr, Schnitzer & Frackmann 2008, p. 153). ESU also claims major problems in recognition (due to superficial implementation of ECTS) and a lack of commitment of many higher education institutions to mobility. On the basis of the findings of these studies, one would conclude that a further substantial rise in temporary mobility within the EHEA would only be possible through a significant increase in mobility funding, at the national but particularly the European level.

Assessing the **development of student mobility** in the Bologna period meets with various shortcomings of the existing set of data. For degree mobility, many EHEA countries still collect only data on nationality (which is a bad proxy for “true” mobility) and not on actual mobility. For temporary mobility, data exist only for European (and partly national) programmes, but not for students mobile outside of programmes. This shortcoming is partly compensated by graduate surveys or the EUROSTUDENT survey, but neither covers all EHEA countries, nor are they based on full counts, but rather on samples. Notwithstanding, the available statistics and surveys indicate on average a very promising development of mobility volumes. We must underline, however, that mobility levels differ dramatically between individual EHEA countries and that mobility flows into and out of many countries are not balanced. Likewise, we stress that it is not possible to establish a clear causal link between the Bologna reforms and the increased mobility levels, simply because the EHEA is not the only factor likely to have affected trends.

The number of mobile students in Erasmus almost doubled between 1998/99 and 2008/09, to nearly 200,000 annually. However, this overall increase in **temporary mobility** hides important differences in individual countries, where sometimes numbers stagnated or went down. The rise is also partly explained by the entry of new countries in the programme, and by a new programme component (traineeships), which was earlier funded in the Leonardo programme. Erasmus reaches about 1% of the student population per year. Assuming that students are on average enrolled for five years, this would result in a 5% share of all students with an Erasmus period. There are no regular statistics on temporary mobility outside of Erasmus. The EUROSTUDENT survey (Orr, Schnitzer & Frackmann 2008) provides an assessment for 19 EHEA countries of the shares of students who have been mobile in the course of studies. The share of mobile students ranged from 19% in Norway to 3% in Turkey. It must be noted, though, that EUROSTUDENT does not only count study abroad, but also other study-related activities, such as traineeships, summer and language courses, often of very short duration. For Germany, the recent EMBAC study (Schomburg 2010) identified a percentage of graduates with study abroad or other study-related activities of 34% in 2007, up from 29% in 1999. According to this study, Germany had already reached the Bologna target of 20% when the Bologna Process began, and mobility rates have gone up since.

Outbound **degree mobility** has increased by more than one third between 1999 and 2007 in 32 out of 47 countries covered in the recent mobility study of Teichler, Wächter & Lungu (2011). This appears impressive, but it is less than the increase in total enrolment in those countries, which is why the percentage of outbound degree mobile students has even slightly decreased in the 1999-2007 period and stands at slightly over 3%. The vast majority of outbound degree mobile students study in another EHEA country. Outflows to single non-European countries, such as the USA and Australia, have actually decreased. By and large, we would not conclude that the Bologna reforms have had a marked effect on outbound degree mobility, and especially not towards non-EHEA destination countries. This is different with inbound degree mobility from outside of the EHEA. There has been robust growth in the influx of non-EHEA students over the Bologna period, whose numbers have almost doubled between 1999 and 2007. Every second foreign student worldwide was enrolled in an EHEA country in 2007. Of the total of roughly 1.5 million foreign students in the EHEA in 2007, more than half originated from outside the EHEA. Numbers of non-EHEA-nationality students in the EHEA have grown significantly faster than numbers of foreign students with an EHEA nationality. They also grew much faster than the enrolment of national students in the EHEA. Part of this impressive growth is likely due to push effects (insufficient higher education capacity in countries of origin). But we believe that a

larger part is due to the perceived attractiveness of higher education of the countries in the EHEA and the fact that the creation of the BA-MA structure has created an "entry point" for non-European BA graduates which did not exist in most EHEA countries before.

The data situation on **staff mobility** is still far worse than that on the mobility of students. On the basis of existing data, it is close to impossible to assess even the rough volumes of the mobility of staff (with the exception of short-term Erasmus staff mobility).

### 2.2.3. Recognition of Qualifications and Lifelong Learning

#### *History*

The importance of recognition for the emergence of an EHEA was already emphasised by the Sorbonne Declaration (1998). It was envisaged to improve international transparency of courses and ensure recognition of qualifications through gradual convergence towards a common framework of qualifications and cycles of study. The main recognition instrument and the only legally binding text is the Lisbon Recognition Convention of the Council of Europe/UNESCO (1997). The process of increasing transparency and improving recognition is facilitated by the ENIC and NARIC centres. Other recognition tools are the Diploma Supplement, ECTS and the QF EHEA. According to the Bergen Communiqué (2005) appropriate recognition procedures should create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for recognition of prior learning, and thus further embed lifelong learning in higher education.

#### *Achievements and future challenges*

According to the Stocktaking Report, the **Diploma Supplement** (DS) has been fully introduced in over half the Bologna countries (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 67). This means it is provided to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language (usually English). In the remaining countries the DS is either issued only on request or for a fee. In two countries the DS is not yet systematically issued (*ibid.*). Provision of the DS varies among student groups. While almost all countries issue the DS to holders of BA and MA degrees, fewer than two thirds of the countries issue the DS to doctoral candidates. In addition, in seven countries the DS is not issued to graduates of traditional degree programmes, while in four countries it is not issued to graduates of "short Bachelor" programmes (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 68). In many cases, higher education institutions demand further reference documents in addition to the DS. This is mainly due to the fact that not enough graduates currently hold a DS. Thus it is apparent that awareness of the existence and utility of the DS must be increased further among students, higher education institutions and employers. Currently, there exists only limited information on whether and how the DS is used by these groups (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 56). Therefore appropriate monitoring procedures must be introduced in all countries. In addition, it is important to promote the usage of the DS according to the EU/CoE/UNESCO standards within the Bologna countries. In this respect, Sursock & Smidt (2010, p. 55) also report that the DS often varies in content, structure and layout, which minimises the quality of the document. The Europass framework should continue to be used for promoting the DS (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 70).

The **Lisbon Recognition Convention** (LRC) has been ratified by almost all countries; however, its country-specific implementation differs widely (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 44). By January 2011, 46 Bologna signatory states have ratified the LRC. Only Greece has so far taken no steps at all in this regard. Despite these achievements the compatibility of national legislation with the LRC needs to be developed further in the Bologna countries. The ratification of the LRC cannot be equated with a uniform implementation of the LRC principles and subsidiary texts. Rather, interpretation of the

LRC principles, terminology and recognition procedures diverge significantly (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 44). Regarding the application of the LRC principles, it is therefore necessary to find a shared language and uniform standards of implementation. Particular attention in this context must be given to the definition and interpretation of "substantial differences", which differ greatly across the Bologna countries (*ibid.*, p. 46). A prerequisite for this is that universities understand the transfer of the LRC principles and subsidiary texts into higher education law not as a threat to their autonomy but as an opportunity to strengthen their international profile.

All countries currently apply **ECTS** or a compatible system (EACEA/Eurydice 2010, p. 21). Differences however exist in the procedures, the purposes for which credit points are awarded and the basis on which they are transferred. Full implementation of ECTS will be achieved when at least 75% of institutions and degree programmes use credit points to transfer and accumulate academic achievement, and implement them based on student workload and learning outcomes (*ibid.*). Recent research (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC (2010)) shows that only 12 countries meet these requirements. 22 countries either evaluate only student workload (participation in attendance lectures) or learning outcomes; 13 other countries employ neither of these two concepts (see Annex fig. 2). The extent to which credit points are awarded in doctoral programmes varies widely. No comparable indicators currently exist; therefore the evaluation reports make only general comments in this regard. In some countries, credit points are already awarded across all doctoral programmes, in some only for taught courses and in others not at all (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 48). The number of credit points awarded is regulated at institutional level.

An appropriate representation of formally acquired qualifications in the form of ECTS can only be achieved by awarding credit points based on learning outcomes. The EU's ECTS Users' Guide provides instructions on how to do this, and the EU Tuning project offers recommendations for practical implementation. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding the proper linkage of credits with learning outcomes (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 55). Better interlinking would also increase the value of the DS and could contribute to achievements gained abroad being more easily recognised by students' home institutions.

Only a few countries have a well established system for **recognition of prior learning (RPL)**, including non-formal and informal qualifications acquired before entering a higher education programme. According to Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009, p. 82), no significant progress has been made in this field compared to 2007. The use and prevalence of procedures for recognising prior learning has different traditions across the EHEA. In almost two thirds of the countries these qualifications are counted towards admission requirements for university degree programmes, while 25 countries recognise them in the form of exemption from certain requirements within study programmes. In 22 countries prior learning is translated into credit points (*ibid.*). RPL is in many cases at the discretion of the higher education institutions, and it is left to individuals to ask for recognition of their previous achievements.

RPL is only one aspect of **lifelong learning (LLL)**. According to the BFUG Coordinating Group on Lifelong Learning a number of activities have taken place to promote better understanding of LLL in higher education since 2007. The group also stated that considerable progress has been made towards increasing the understanding of LLL in higher education contexts. However, much remains to be done before LLL becomes a full reality in higher education systems across the EHEA. Moreover, there is a need for a

Europe-wide accepted definition of the LLL concept as well as for comprehensive and reliable data, especially on funding of LLL (EACEA/Eurydice 2010, p. 34). Perhaps EU's European Universities' Charter on LLL and future projects of EU's LLL programme will contribute to make progress in this area.

#### 2.2.4. Employability

##### **History**

The employability of graduates was (together with enhanced competitiveness, comparability and compatibility of European higher education) one of the overarching policy aims of the original Bologna Declaration. It is a central motivation behind a number of operational action lines, above all, the introduction of the new degree structure. Employability remained a key item in all Ministerial Communiqués since 2001, but it gained prominence only at the London Meeting (2007), which identified it as one of seven priority areas for the period until 2009. The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009) subsequently made it a key action line for the coming decade. The London Meeting (2007) also set up a working group on employability, which defined the phenomenon as "the ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment and to be able to move around within the labour market." In line with this, a core employability concern has been the acceptance of the new degrees on the labour market and particularly of the BA (where serious doubts had been raised). Other prominent issues in the employability debate were the involvement of employers and other stakeholders in curriculum development (and, to a lesser extent, in quality assurance and governance). Also important in the discussion has been the redesign of curricula with a view to enhancing labour-market relevance, such as the integration of practical experience (traineeships) and key competencies, as well as tools such as career development services. Such efforts aimed at a clarification of the concept notwithstanding, employability has remained one of the less self-explanatory elements of the Bologna Process.

##### **Achievements and future challenges**

The attempts to measure progress towards greater employability have been hampered by a serious lack of good quality information and data. As a result, our knowledge on the impact of the Bologna reforms on employability of graduates is patchy, at best.

As part of the data collection for the Stocktaking Report (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009), national governments were asked to provide **employment statistics on Bologna degree graduates**, but very few countries provided useful graduate employment statistics. In the few cases where data were available, the picture was hardly revealing: most graduates of "professional" BAs move on to employment, while most holders of "academic" BAs had continued to the MA level. The same study provided at least some indications that BA graduates are not at a disadvantage for public-service careers. The Trends report (Sursock & Smidt 2010) paints a slightly more negative and diverse picture. It does not provide employment data, but focuses on attitudes of higher education institutions: only a small fraction of representatives of universities view the BA as a qualification fit for entry to the labour market, while almost half of non-university (college) representatives do so. In contrast, representatives of both types of institutions see no major problems with the acceptance of MA degrees. A much more upbeat picture emerges from the recent EMBAC study for Germany (Schomburg 2010). The study, which surveyed some 70,000 graduates of 50 German higher education institutions 1.5 years after graduation in 2007 and 2008, found no significant differences in the employment of BA graduates and those with "pre-Bologna" degrees. Unemployment rates were low, at 4% for university graduates and 6% for *Fachhochschul*-BAs. 78% of university BAs continued

to the MA level, compared to 43% from *Fachhochschulen*. Overall, the study does not support the expressions of concern about labour market disadvantages for BA graduates. Further studies, from Norway and the Netherlands (Arnesen & Waagene 2009; Westerheijden et al. 2008), produced findings that point in similar directions and offer additional potential for interpretation. The two studies found that few students left higher education for employment after graduating with a BA. Percentages ranged between 5 in the Netherlands and 15 in Norway. Graduates pursuing employment after the BA were particularly rare in the traditional 'university' sector (as distinct from the 'college' sector). However, there are strong indications, particularly in the case of the Netherlands, that this is not a result of the employment systems' rejection of BA graduates, but of the graduates' lack of valuing a BA degree. The Dutch study underlines that the BA graduates seeking employment had "the same high job chances as other university degree holders". It appears that the root of the problem – if it is one – is not a lack of labour market acceptance of the BA (which many critics of the new degree structure had predicted), but a sceptical attitude on the part of BA graduates (from universities) and the universities themselves (see above).

The **involvement of employers** and other stakeholders is frequently seen as a proxy for attempts to increase the employability of graduates. The expectation was that such involvement would primarily take place in curriculum development, but also in quality assurance and governance. The Stocktaking Report (2009) identified "some" involvement of employers in a majority of signatory countries, mostly in curriculum development. It also notes "national consultations" and legislative action in some countries. The Trends Report (2010) saw a decrease in employers' involvement compared to the previous report (2007), but an increase in the involvement of professional bodies. This study also sheds some doubts on the commitment to employability of university-type higher education institutions and it reports a dearth of institutional efforts to trace the graduates' careers.

Practically no systematic information is available on the question whether and to what extent institutions have redesigned curricula and introduced services to enhance graduate employability. We thus do not know if Bologna degrees more often than their predecessors involve traineeships and placements, provide key competencies and generic skills, and offer students career guidance. However, the increased demand for student placement mobility in Erasmus suggests a positive development in this area.

## 2.2.5. Social Dimension

### **History**

The social dimension was first mentioned in the Prague Communiqué (2001), on the initiative of student representatives. It reappears in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), which states that "the need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area", but it does not acquire any centrality until the Bergen Ministerial Meeting (2005), where it is referred to as a "constituent part" of the EHEA and a "necessary condition" for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA. The Bergen Meeting also sets up a working group on the social dimension (and mobility), which elaborates for the first time a quasi-definition for the objective of the social dimension later adopted in the London Communiqué (2007), i.e. that "the student body *entering, participating in and completing* higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations". Ministers in London also asked for the social dimension to become part of the regular stocktaking exercise, which first happened in 2009. The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Ministerial Meeting (2009) agreed that "each participating country will set measurable targets for widening overall participation

and increasing participation of underrepresented groups", to be reached by 2020. These targets have not yet been set, but will be worked out in a BFUG working group.

### ***Achievements and future challenges***

For a number of reasons, it is at present nearly impossible to track with any precision the impact of the Bologna Process on the social dimension of higher education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process:

- A stated objective of the social dimension was only named in 2007, and no specific indicators and measurable targets have yet been agreed. It is therefore too early to expect measurable results.
- Social concerns have influenced national higher education policies in many Bologna countries before the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, and it is therefore difficult to attribute the present state of affairs solely or mainly to the Bologna Process.
- The social dimension is, in comparison to "clear-cut" elements such as the new degree structure or the introduction of credit point systems, a heterogeneous (if not amorphous) concept, which complicates the measurement of progress.

The final point above is particularly important. Despite this, the following elements have crystallized as central for the social dimension:

- A general increase in participation in higher education (irrespective of social origin);
- An increase of participation in higher education among underrepresented groups, among them, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, immigrants and cultural minorities, students with disabilities, "mature" students/lifelong learners, male and female students;
- An increase in retention of students (and again especially of underrepresented groups);
- Measures put in place to address the above.

At a global level, Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009) came to the conclusion that the social dimension is so far more of a rhetorical than a real success of the Bologna Process. They found that almost all Bologna countries pursue policies of "participative equity", but only a minority systematically monitor progress in this area. Moreover, they found that most countries lacked a coherent strategy on the social dimension, which would integrate social concerns with other Bologna aims, in the area of lifelong learning, flexible learning paths and the recognition of prior learning, for example. Overall, they concluded that there is still "a long way to go before the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels will reflect the diversity of populations" in the EHEA (*ibid.*, p. 15).

The evaluation reports relate a range encouraging developments and some challenges, too. More in detail:

- Some countries participating in the Bologna Process report substantial increases in overall participation rates (irrespective of social origin).
- Progress is recorded in the participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but in most countries, it is still not the "ability to learn but the ability

to pay" which determines participation (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009). This is confirmed by CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC (2010), which find that the education level of parents is a strong determinant of participation in most Bologna countries.

- Likewise, students from (less educated) immigrant communities and cultural minorities remain underrepresented.
- While efforts are under way to cater for students with disabilities, many countries acknowledged shortcomings.
- Access to higher education by "mature" students, is often hindered by the non-recognition of informally and non-formally acquired qualifications. These individual also often have problems (economic and others) to combine work and study (lack of part-time offers, courses at non-traditional times or other types of flexible learning modes). In almost half of the countries which provided data for the Independent Assessment, the share of students who entered higher education through the recognition of prior learning was under 1%, and nowhere did it surpass 15% (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 60). This is consistent with the last two Trends Reports (2007, 2010), according to which lifelong learning remains at the periphery of institutional strategic development and curriculum development, with very slow progress, despite the prevalence of LLL rhetoric in Bologna policy discussions.
- In terms of gender participation, Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009, p. 130) and CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC (2010, p. 58) note that female students are now equally or in some countries overrepresented, except in science disciplines and in the second and third cycle.
- In order to enhance retention (and graduation), some form of guidance and counselling is available in most countries participating in the Bologna Process, most commonly in relation to educational, psychological and career issues (as well as for disabled students). But only in one third of all countries are such services widespread and of good quality (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 55).
- High funding levels for social dimension purposes (high direct financial aid, low student payments for study and high public investment in higher education) exist in a small number of countries in the north-west of Europe and in Cyprus, while the situation is the opposite in most countries in the south and south-east of the EHEA (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 57).

## 2.2.6. Quality Assurance

### ***History***

Since the Bologna Declaration of 1999, promoting European co-operation in the field of quality assurance (QA) has been one of the central action lines of the Bologna Process. The introduction of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) as well as the establishment of the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) are important milestones in this context. The review of national QA systems against ESG helps to improve the comparability and compatibility of QA systems in the EHEA and thus facilitates international cooperation in the Bologna Process. In this respect EQAR is the first institution in Europe that makes transparent which agencies substantially fulfil the ESG requirements.

### ***Achievements and future challenges***

According to Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009, p. 51), the higher education institutions in most countries are actively working to develop uniform **internal quality**

**assurance** systems and align them to external evaluation procedures. In 47 higher education systems internal and external QA measures are currently applied across higher education institutions (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 30). The number of higher education systems that regularly carry out internal evaluations for QA purposes is 18. Only 16 countries state that their internal and external QA measures have been adapted to the ESG (*ibid.*). From this it is obvious that QA measures must be further adapted to the ESG in order to promote European co-operation in QA. The contents of the ESG and the interlinking of national QA systems with the ESG must be transparently and widely publicised at national levels (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 65). The ESG must in turn be adapted to the respective currently agreed targets of the Bologna Process, e.g. in the area of mobility (European Commission 2009b, p. 5). According to Sursock & Smidt (2010, p. 88) external and internal QA measures must be better interlinked, requiring external methods to be adapted to the differences in internal processes and the higher education institutions to be respected as designers of these processes (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 88). Aspects such as transnational education, lifelong learning, short and distance studies, online courses and specific services for students must be better covered in the future (European Commission 2009b, p. 10).

In the past 10 years, new QA agencies were founded in 22 countries (in half of these countries since 2005), although these entities differ in terms of size, extent, objectives, focus and internationality (EACEA/Eurydice 2010, p. 26). In the Stocktaking Report, a country scores highest when all institutions that adhere to the ESG have been reviewed by an **external quality assurance** agency evaluated by an external team of experts. This is true of 16 countries (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 59). In a further 17 countries a date has already been set on which the QA agency is to be evaluated by an expert team in accordance with the ESG. Compared to 2007, some countries have dropped (due to stricter evaluation standards) to a yellow score because the QA agency has not yet been externally evaluated and/or no date for such an evaluation has yet been set.

In the Stocktaking Report, a country scores highest if there is **student participation** in the governance of national QA bodies, the external evaluation of higher education institutions and courses, internal QA processes and the preparation of self-assessment reports; this is the case in 19 countries (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 60). Compared to 2007, students were integrated more often into the QA process overall, however they participate in the governance of national QA offices in fewer than two thirds of the countries. Students are most often involved in externally evaluating higher education institutions and courses as part of an external expert group. In one third of such cases however they have only observer status (*ibid.*, p. 62), and in 12 countries they are not involved in the subsequent decision-making process. Students participate in internal QA processes in three quarters of the countries; however they are involved in preparing self-assessment reports in far fewer countries (*ibid.*). Thus students must be better integrated into evaluation and QA processes, in particular in the implementation of "follow-up measures" and the decision-making process for quality assurance (ESU 2009, p. 49).

A country is a "high achiever" in the **internationalisation of quality assurance** if there is international participation in external reviews of institutions and courses, the governance of national QA bodies and the external evaluation of national QA agencies (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 63). In 2009 this was true of 16 countries. According to Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels (2009, p. 64), the increase in countries in the dark and light green range indicates that internationalisation in QA has increased overall. Despite these developments, the European dimension of QA remains limited (European Commission 2009b, p. 8). Although external expert teams are often already internationally

staffed, there are still only a small number of higher education institutions that endeavour to be evaluated or accredited by an agency from another country (*ibid.*). Also, further steps towards the Europeanization of quality assurance and accreditation are urgently needed, in order to create commonalities and overcome the danger of a fragmentation of European higher education (Expert Group 2010, p. 7). To guard against fake degrees from so-called 'degree mills' and increase mutual trust, it is necessary to expand international collaboration in this field. By listing certified quality assurance agencies, EQAR is designed to facilitate the search for a QA agency from abroad. Significant progress has been made in the membership in ENQA, EQAR or similar international QA networks. Currently, 48 QA agencies and organisations from 25 countries are full or associate members of ENQA. Since its founding in 2008, EQAR has admitted 24 members. It is crucial that higher education institutions be entitled to select the QA agency of their choice from this register (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 65). Despite progress in membership of international QA networks, the regular involvement of international experts in evaluation processes is only true for three quarters of the Bologna countries; and in fewer than half of the Bologna countries are international representatives included in the governance bodies of QA agencies. Compared to 2007, the scores of some countries have dropped (as a result of stricter evaluation criteria) because they have not yet formed external expert teams with international participation and none of their higher education institutions is a member of an international QA network (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels, p. 63).

## 2.2.7. Qualifications Frameworks

### ***History***

In 2005, the Ministers adopted an overarching Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (QF EHEA), designed to promote European co-operation in describing and defining formal qualifications in higher education. In addition, the EU developed the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF LLL) and recommended its use to the Member States (European Parliament & Council 2008). In contrast to the QF EHEA for the three Bologna cycles, the eight-level EQF LLL covers the entire span of qualifications, from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. The EQF LLL descriptors at levels 5 to 8 refer to higher education. Both frameworks seek to contribute to enhancing QA and mobility in Europe by making qualifications comparable in terms of learning outcomes. The Ministers agreed to develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) linked to the QF EHEA, based on learning outcomes and workload. National approaches to implement NQFs vary across the EHEA. Some countries modelled their NQF on the QF EHEA, others on the EQF LLL or both European QFs.

### ***Achievements and future challenges***

While in 2005 only Ireland and Scotland had NQFs, since then by far the majority of Bologna countries have initiated the process of defining and introducing a qualifications framework at national level (see Annex fig. 3). Eight countries have already completed the entire process and self-certified their compatibility with the QF EHEA. Eleven countries have already made extensive progress in implementing a NQF. The remaining countries have initiated the process, some of them however only recently. These findings clearly show that in most Bologna countries the NQF has not been implemented by 2010, as originally envisaged by the Ministers. The Ministers, therefore, urge the countries lagging behind to achieve implementation by 2012 (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 41). The introduction of the NQF based on the EQF LLL is more protracted because it covers all levels of education. It is assumed that adapting the NQS to both European frameworks will still take some time (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 42). Malta is so far the only country to have certified its NQF as compatible with both European QFs.

Qualifications are to be made measurable on the basis of learning outcomes (described as knowledge, understanding, learning skills, etc) in order to facilitate the comparability and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal qualifications, regardless of learning methods and learning context. The development from input-oriented approaches to output-oriented approaches requires a fundamental change of thinking among students and teaching personnel with regard to teaching and learning methods and a significant amount of time and money (Sursock & Smidt 2010, pp. 58-59). In the field of regulated professions the orientation of qualifications frameworks towards learning outcomes may raise compatibility problems with the EU directive 2005/36, which is based on content issues.

For higher education institutions the greatest challenge is the practical implementation of the learning outcomes and competencies specified in the qualifications frameworks in the upcoming curriculum reforms (CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010, p. 41). Experience and reference lists for certain subjects exist from the Tuning project and can serve as a basis here (ibid., 40). Institutions, however, still have problems particularly in understanding the importance of learning outcomes (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 7).

Students must be more centrally involved in the process of describing and defining qualifications (ESU 2010, p. 78). Data from student and graduate surveys to assess whether intended qualifications were actually acquired and whether they are compatible with the respective requirements are essential in designing the content of the NQFs.

## 2.2.8. Linking EHEA and ERA

### ***History***

The Ministers had already demanded the creation of a closer link between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA) in the Berlin Communiqué of 2003, a demand that was again emphasised by the EP in 2008. Doctoral education was identified as the central link between higher education and research, and was therefore to be included in the Bologna degree structure as a third main cycle. Those enrolled in the third cycle of higher education are defined both as students and/or as early stage researchers. In Bergen (2005) the Ministers demanded that doctoral training should be more strongly structured and degrees at the doctorate level should be adapted to the QF EHEA using a results-based approach. Excessive regulation of doctoral training was, however, to be avoided. In their London Communiqué (2007), the Ministers called upon institutions to reinforce their efforts to embed doctoral programmes in their strategies and policies, and to develop appropriate career paths and opportunities for doctoral candidates and early stage researchers in order to strengthen research capacity and improve the quality and competitiveness of European higher education.

### ***Achievements and future challenges***

The implementation of the third cycle is already showing significant progress in the form of a wider range of structured programmes and the increased founding of "doctoral schools" (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels 2009, p. 47). Compared to 2007, in 2009 more countries stated that doctoral training had been integrated into the national QF or its integration was planned (ibid.). This is, however, not a development towards a uniform European model for doctoral programmes. Doctoral training in Europe is expected in future to continue to be characterised by its diversity (Wilson 2010, p. 27) and it will be an important task to further expand structured doctoral programmes while preserving their diversity. Meanwhile, it can be observed that the significance of collaborative doctoral programmes

between universities and industry is increasing (Wilson 2010, p. 27; EUA 2009). A successful example of public-private cooperation in this area is the Danish Industrial PhD project, which is a three-year business-focused PhD scheme where the student is hired by a company and enrolled in a university at the same time. In 2009, Business Europe suggested the creation of a European industrial doctorate, inspired by the Danish Industrial PhD scheme (Business Europe 2009). A similar proposal was made by the EP (2009). EU programmes such as Marie Curie, Erasmus Mundus and the EIT could support this type of doctoral training (European Commission 2008).

Doctoral training has also become more international in recent years and the creation of joint doctoral programmes between different countries will be increasingly significant in the coming years (Wilson 2010, p. 27). The above-mentioned EU programmes, as well as bilateral national schemes, will be important instruments to further develop cooperation and mobility in this area and to accelerate the internationalisation of doctoral training.

A great challenge exists in interlinking the training of doctoral candidates, their professional careers and mobility in the European Knowledge Area (Sursock & Smidt 2010, p. 97). This requires the Bologna co-operation model to be extended, including other ministries that jointly work on issues such as social security, visas, portability of grants, etc. (Council 2010). In this context the status of doctoral students must be clarified. Moreover, more comprehensive and reliable data on doctoral education and mobility are needed at national and European level.

Beyond doctoral education, current evaluations do not say much about links between higher education and research. This is a clear deficit that has to be taken into account when designing future Bologna reports. We urgently need more and better information on how Bologna affects the relationship between higher education and research, the emergence of new modes of cooperation between both sectors, as well as national and European strategies and funding in this area.

## 2.2.9. External Dimension

### *History*

The "objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education" and the need "to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction" are already mentioned in the original Bologna Declaration. However, the external dimension was originally an overarching strategic goal rather than a concrete action line. The expectation was that the original action lines (such as the degree structure, credit points and quality assurance) would produce the enhanced "attractiveness" and "competitiveness". In the early years, official Bologna documents put very little emphasis on the external dimension. This changed in 2005, when the Bergen Ministerial Meeting requested the development of an "external strategy", which was adopted in London (2007). The strategy defined five "core policy areas" for future attention, thus turning the external dimension into a concrete action line. The "core policy areas" were:

- improving information (for non-EHEA audiences) on the Bologna Process,
- promoting (marketing) European higher education world-wide,
- strengthening cooperation based on partnerships (development),
- starting a policy dialogue with non-EHEA countries, and
- furthering recognition between the EHEA and other countries.

### **Achievements and future challenges**

In assessing the success of the "external dimension" of the EHEA, one must differentiate between at least three clusters of issues, i.e. the impact of the Bologna Process on (1) the global higher education reform debate, (2) the inflow of students from outside the EHEA and (3) the progress made in the implementation of the five "core policy areas".

As the Zgaga report (2007) underlined, the EHEA reforms had a very positive **resonance amongst policy makers outside of the EHEA** and "compatibility" with Bologna structures became a concern in many countries of the world. Some international observers even found that the Bologna reforms have the potential to become "the dominant global higher education model within the next two decades" (Adelman 2009, p. viii). CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC (2010, p. 77) came to largely the same conclusion, though their work also found that "few people outside a small circle of experts ... and among policy makers were well aware of the Process".

**Mobility of students into the EHEA** has increased very visibly since the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, which can be seen as an indication of its "world-wide degree of attraction". The EHEA area continues to hold a share of over 50% of all foreign students enrolled worldwide, despite growing competition. The growth in numbers of inbound non-EHEA students considerably surpassed global growth levels. Between 1999 and 2007, the last years for which quality-assured data are available, the influx of students from non-EHEA origins almost doubled. We must, however, draw attention to the fact that there need not necessarily be a causal link between the Bologna reforms and the upswing in inbound student mobility.

**Implementation work in the "core policy areas"** has started, but it is too early to be able to measure concrete outcomes. Progress is most visible in the "policy dialogue": two Bologna Policy Forums, which brought together European Ministers and their counterparts from non-EHEA countries, have been held back-to-back with the Ministerial Meetings of 2009 and 2010. Information provision has been enhanced by means of the (migrating) Bologna website. Global cooperation on recognition is ongoing (though it started before Bologna); the same goes for higher education cooperation in an aid context ("partnerships"). We see some deficits in the promotion and marketing of the EHEA globally. While signatory country efforts range from strong commitment to zero action (a survey to assess present activity is now under way), action at the European level (to promote Europe and the EHEA as a whole) has been less than forceful. A European-level marketing activity ("Global Promotion Project"), which ran from 2007 to 2009, has so far remained without a successor.



### 3. CONCLUSIONS

With their signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the Ministers responsible for education in 30 European countries resolved to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010. The EHEA was to be characterised within Europe by greater compatibility and comparability of its higher education systems, and externally by greater global attractiveness and competitiveness. This initiated an international convergence process that, in conjunction with other European and national modernisation agendas, had profound effects on the higher education landscape in Europe over the following decade. Based on various evaluation reports, and despite some criticism of the reforms, the Ministers of the now 47 Bologna countries were already able to present impressive results at their anniversary conference in Budapest and Vienna in 2010, where they noted that good progress had been made in implementing the Bologna Process and developing the European Higher Education Area. Nonetheless, the findings of the Bologna reports made clear that (in some cases for understandable reasons) the reforms had been implemented to varying extents in different countries, and several of the defined operational targets would not be fully achieved by 2010. The Ministers therefore set a new deadline for completing the Bologna reforms, which are now to be concluded by 2020. The evaluations and a number of critical voices have also made clear that information and communication regarding the aims of the reforms must be improved, and those at whom the reforms are aimed and those who are tasked with implementing them must be better involved in the process. The Ministers see precisely this as a central task for the coming years.

The stocktaking of Bologna Process results shows that excellent progress has been made particularly regarding the introduction of the two-cycle degree structure and quality assurance. But even in these areas the reforms are not yet fully completed. A number of subjects have yet to be included in the structural reform and some quality assurance systems are still not consistently aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines. Despite some fears, mobility (in particular of students) has overall continued to increase within Europe and to Europe, a result that is due mainly to the mobility programmes of the EU, but also to national efforts. The 20% mobility target set by the Ministers will only be achieved everywhere by 2020 if various obstacles to mobility (e.g. insufficient funding and recognition of periods abroad) are removed as quickly as possible and incentives to mobility (e.g. mobility-friendly curricula and joint degree programmes) are created. The external perception of the reform process is also encouraging. An increasing number of countries in other parts of the world are observing the process with great interest and intend to draw conclusions for higher education in their regions based on this convergence model. This also results in new opportunities for Europe to engage in a worldwide dialogue to intensify global higher education collaboration, a process that has already begun with the Bologna Policy Forum but still offers room for expansion (through, among other things, EU initiatives and projects).

At the same time, special efforts will have to be made in the coming years with regard to some aspects of the reform process. For example, far too few countries have introduced national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with the EHEA-wide framework of qualifications. In view of the importance of this tool for transparency, recognition, mobility and lifelong learning, rapid action is required here. Significantly greater attention must be given to the "social dimension" in order to enable the widest possible access to education and equitable participation in educational opportunities. In this area in particular, reliable data and indicators are lacking, as are comprehensive strategies. The employability of graduates and in particular the acceptance of the Bachelor degree on the labour market must be improved. Closer co-operation with the world of work would certainly be helpful here, which could also serve to benefit doctoral training, specifically as concerns the development of more collaborative doctoral programmes jointly offered by universities and enterprises. The increased introduction of these and other models of structured doctoral

training (e.g. joint European doctorates) could strengthen the currently still insufficient connection between the EHEA and the European Research Area. However, this would also require other innovative efforts beyond doctoral training that have so far not been part of the Bologna Process.

Although the Bologna Process is organised inter-governmentally and the Member States themselves are individually responsible for organising the higher education reforms, the EU has for many years – and in line with its remit – politically supported the process and promoted it through its education and research programmes, and thus contributed significantly to its success so far. An even closer alignment of funding priorities to the Bologna targets, specific European projects, and most importantly better financial provision for the next generation of its programmes (2014 – 2020) would enable the EU to further expand its supporting role and contribute even more effectively to completing the European higher education reforms.

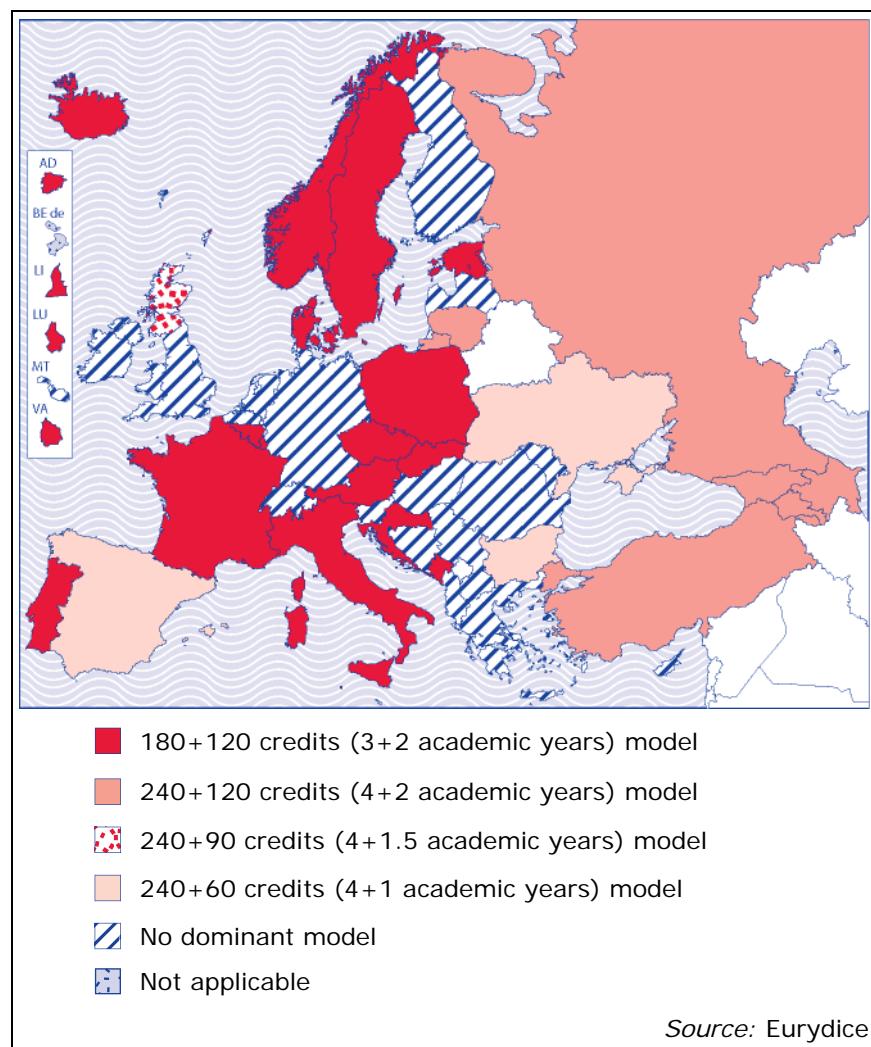
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## ANNEX

**Map 1: Bologna structure models most commonly implemented, 2009/10**



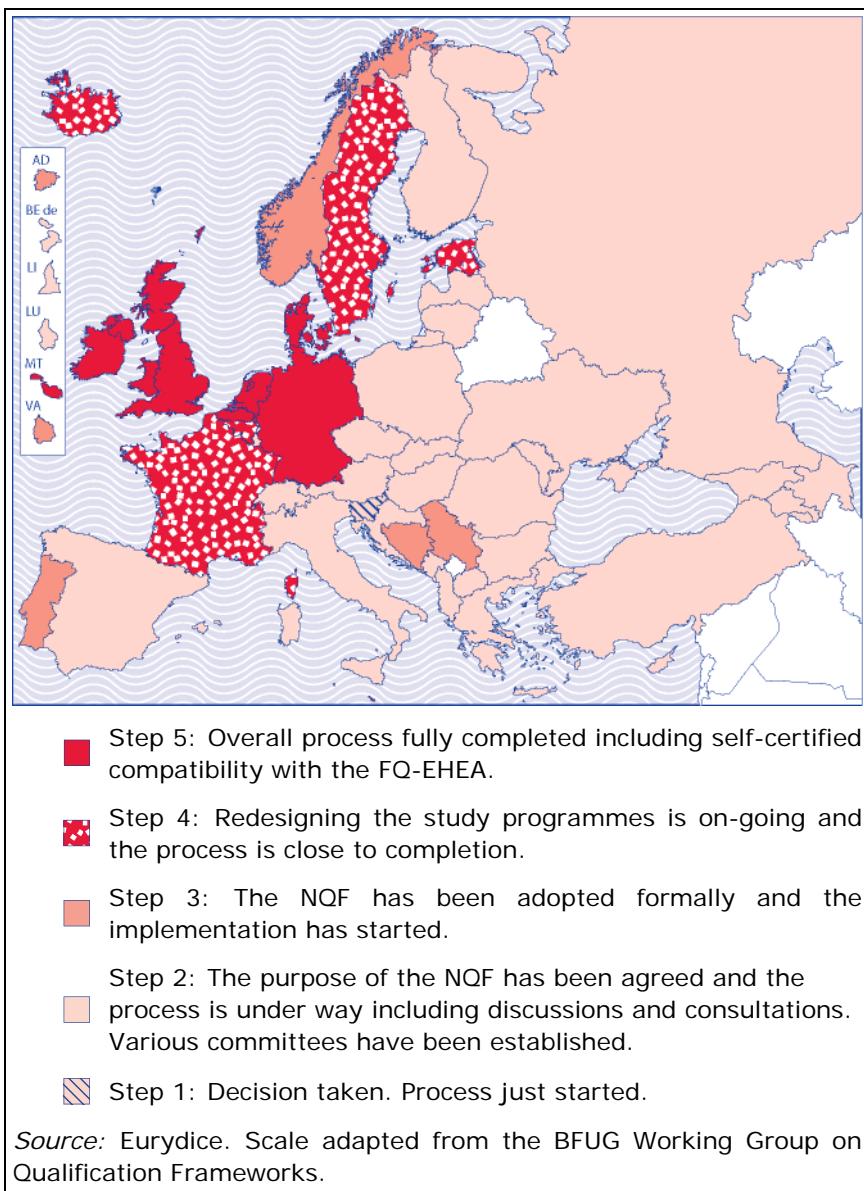
**Table 1: Dominant practice in the allocation of credits**

<b>DOMINANT PRACTICE</b>	<b>HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF COUNTRIES</b>
1. Credits allocated to courses based on estimation of the average student workload and defined and written learning outcomes.	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Holy See, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Poland, Russia, Sweden, UK-Scotland.	<b>12</b>
2. Credits allocated to courses based on estimated average student workload, but without using learning outcomes.	Andorra, Austria, Belgium-FI, Belgium-Fr, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta <sup>1</sup> , Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, Slovenia <sup>2</sup> .	<b>18</b>
3. Credits allocated to courses based on defined and written learning outcomes, but without estimation of average student workload.	Croatia <sup>2</sup> , The Netherlands, Romania, EU-E/W/NI.	<b>4</b>
4. Credits allocated to courses based on teaching / contact hours.	Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina <sup>3</sup> , Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Serbia <sup>4</sup> , Slovakia, Spain <sup>4</sup> , Turkey, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'	<b>11</b>
5. Credits formally allocated to individual courses without any specific rationale.	Georgia, Ukraine	<b>2</b>

**Notes:** Missing information for Armenia. 1 Malta: the University is working towards using learning outcomes. 2 Croatia and Slovenia could also be placed in category 4 due to varying practice. 3 Bosnia and Herzegovina could also be placed in category 3 for some institutions. 4 Serbia and Spain could be placed under category 2 for the new programmes.

**Source:** National Reports for the Bologna Process 2007-2009 in CHEPS, INCHER & ECOTEC 2010.

**Map 2: Stage of National Qualifications Framework development compatible with the QF EHEA, 2009/10**







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