



**MEETING OF DIRECTOR GENERALS OF HIGHER
EDUCATION AND PRESIDENTS OF RECTORS'
CONFERENCES OF THE EU/EEA**

CORDOBA, 7-9 APRIL, 2002

CONCLUSIONS

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The participants highlighted in first place the enormous interest and importance given to the subject chosen for the Spring 2002 meeting on Higher Education within the scope of Europe, since Doctoral Studies are going to be one of the strong points on the Agendas of both the Council of Education Ministers and the debates relating to the Bologna process. The potential provided by a large number of highly qualified people with a doctorate constitutes a value added that must be exploited with a view to the objective of converting the European economy into the most competitive one in the world, in a society based on knowledge.

Moreover, the specific aspects of mobility and quality, which were selected for this meeting, are directly related to those policies that have been pinpointed as priorities within the European Union, as described in the Work Programme for the development of the objectives laid down for the European Union's educational and training systems for the decade.

In turn, the Director General of Universities of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, who presided over the meeting as the country that holds the Presidency of the European Union during this six-month period, referred to the high political interest of the subjects chosen for the Conference and for the Workshops in the development of the educational reforms that are being undertaken in numerous Member States, including Spain. These reforms will shape the vital role that education and training are going to play in society during the coming years whilst consolidating their importance as the key pillar in the process of constructing Europe.

The Director General also highlighted the excellent opportunity the meeting has provided for getting to know at first hand the initiatives being developed in other countries plus the excellent atmosphere of collaboration and harmony in which the work was carried out, contributing to a fluid exchange of points of view.

Aware of the far-reaching consequences that the debates and conclusions of the meetings of those who are responsible for Higher Education in Europe must have within the context of EU policy, the meeting has provided realistic proposals that combine pragmatism with the ambition of the objectives that it is hoped to achieve. Similarly, agreements have been reached to carry forward a series of important decisions in different frameworks.

Firstly, within the framework of the Bologna process and more specifically and immediately, at the meeting of the Follow-up Committee to be held in Santander on 23rd and 24th May, under the Spanish Presidency, as well as in 2003 at the Berlin Conference:

In connection with the reference that the Bologna Declaration makes to the promotion of association for the appraisal of quality and the need to co-operate in the establishment of criteria to guarantee it, Doctorate Studies constitute a sufficiently important sector, with its own specific characteristics that demand a different treatment as regards the evaluation and quality requirements of these Studies.

In coherence with this approach, the German Director General of Higher Education has announced that Doctorate Studies will be included in the debates of the Berlin Conference to be held in 2003 and that, as from that moment, they will become part of the thematic *corpus* of the deliberations and analysis of the Bologna process.

Secondly, in the Councils of Education Ministers of the European Union, which must be informed and to which proposals must be submitted on a regular basis, according to Doctoral Studies the political dimensions they undoubtedly have, as guarantors of the quality of the human resources that are incorporated into Higher Education institutions and Science and Technology systems, as knowledge-generating centres.

Thus, the next Education Council on 30th May will include a synthesis of these conclusions in the report to be submitted by the Spanish Presidency on the development and results of the semester.

In connection with specific conclusions and proposals, these can be grouped together under five headings:

1. Degree of Convergence:

The result of the summary of the responses to the questionnaire, following the initiative of Sweden in the previous meeting held in Halmstad, highlighted the fact that **the number of common elements is greater than that of the divergences in the Doctoral Studies of the EU Member States**; with these divergences referring mainly to aspects of organization and administration. This allows a certain optimism to reign over the possibility of reaching convergence on these studies, and thereby reinforcing the configuration of a European University Area, which will be vital as regards the role of education in the construction process that must culminate during this decade.

However, the similarities of Doctoral Studies as regards their structure, content, formal aspects and orientation present certain nuances that must be worked on in the next few years. Most countries have already adapted to the common points agreed upon in the Bologna Declaration and in the remaining countries there are already clear signs of convergence, with the adoption of legislative proposals in this sense. Therefore, it can be stated that **to a large extent the Bologna process has contributed to the elimination of divergences.**

At this present moment, these divergences mainly consist of the existence or absence of detailed regulations for these studies, the inclusion of formally established courses and seminars and the use of specific structures, such as centres or schools for doctoral studies. Other aspects where divergences have been detected refer to the minimum duration of the studies, the composition of the examining jury and the public defence of the thesis. As regards the studies' contents, the greatest differences appear in the fields of Engineering and Health Sciences and, to a lesser extent, in Applied Sciences and Economics. It is important to note the trend towards establishing a clear difference between the teaching phase and the research phase of Doctoral Studies.

To a certain extent, the absence of data on some aspects of the organization of courses, such as those relating to the split between teaching and research and its impact on the acceptance of the degree qualification in industry, is hindering the convergence processes.

In general, the existence of inter-university doctorate schools is proving to be an efficient tool for the administration of doctorate programmes in those Member States where this system has been chosen. Consequently, the introduction of such a system is regarded as a recommended step for overcoming divergences in this respect.

2. Quality:

A second point of analysis was quality assessment. **The establishment of quality assessment systems at a national and European level is a Community objective that is still outstanding** and to which important efforts must be devoted in the immediate future. The absence of defined quality-based indicators and specific budgets to support Doctorate courses is a common characteristic in most EU countries.

Taking into consideration the experience of the most advanced countries in the use of assessment mechanisms, reference can be made to **quality assessment systems at different levels: the first level** must be established by the university itself (self-assessment) through its departments, doctorate commissions, etc., in order to ensure that the studies it provides and which in most countries lead to official qualifications are sufficiently guaranteed as being competitive and attractive to students from other Member States or other geographical areas.

A **second level** depends on the establishment of **external assessment** procedures. The need for and importance of external assessment has already been demonstrated in productive systems, and the university, as a public body and institution for the generation of knowledge, must be subjected to quality assessment processes via external mechanisms, as it is in its accounting and budgetary control processes.

These **external assessment systems and mechanisms** must be **established by each country, whether through a quality assessment agency or of some other type.**

The establishment of quality assessment systems is especially important because it gives rise to two further processes that are equally significant for the construction of the Europe of Knowledge: on the one hand, transparency and, on the other, the possibility of the mutual recognition of credits, study periods and qualifications. Debates on mutual recognition based on the transparency of the systems and mechanisms that contribute to a greater degree of trust between Higher Education institutions are at the centre of the discussion and analysis of Education and Training forums in the EU and Doctoral Studies cannot be left on the sidelines in their deliberations.

At the present moment, only about one-third of the European countries have developed an assessment system, normally of an internal nature. Consequently, there is an overriding need to reflect on the way in which to **extend this practice, on the one part, and to make its function homogeneous, on the other.**

Encouraging the **creation of inter-university networks** both within and between Member States is the mechanism that has been proposed by the majority. The initiative implemented by twenty-three universities in the United Kingdom for the organization of a joint doctorate in eight different subject areas, in addition to other similar initiatives in different Member States, point the way to the **future path for reaching the mutual recognition of doctoral studies on the basis of respect for the principle of subsidiarity.**

3. Social Projection:

A third question to be placed in evidence is the need to achieve **greater professional projection for Doctoral Studies so that they have greater impact and obtain social recognition**. The data and figures submitted demonstrate a clear predominance of the academic orientation in most doctoral programmes, with the exception of engineering and health science studies. Doctorate Studies are designed so that the student achieves the required qualification for working in a university or public research centre.

The doctorate must be recognized as a value added in the recruitment by companies and the Public Administrations; as a component that contributes to provide the candidate not only with a higher technical qualification but also with a greater capacity of focus, synthesis, organization and analysis. The point of inflection must pass through the conviction of companies that Doctoral Studies can bring direct advantages to them and not only to the scope of university teaching.

In order to achieve this, there must be greater openness on the part of the universities themselves towards the business sector, which will require efforts aimed at achieving **greater deregulation and agility in the formalities**, as well as **greater orientation in the training of their doctorate-holders towards programmes that are of interest to companies**. **To advance the age of graduation as a doctor** in order to foster the incorporation into companies of doctorate-holders at a stage when they have their greatest innovative potential is another of the proposals that were presented.

Likewise, the **establishment of regular and flexible channels that permit a fluid dialogue to be maintained with the social agents** so as to be aware of the market's demands and training needs and thereby adapt the content of doctoral studies to these needs is another unanimous proposal. The **fostering of the creation and reinforcement of research and technological development centres, technological parks and offices for the transfer of research results**, thereby improving the integration of doctors in the labour structure, is the complement that is required by the previous proposal.

4. Mobility:

The higher education systems in the countries of the EU and the EES contemplate a large variety of grants and aids orientated towards the mobility of doctorate students, offered by origin and destination universities alike. In general, these aids cover the entire doctoral study period, including the training and research phases and have an international scope among a large number of foreign and non-EU universities.

The mobility of students is adequately cared for by national programmes and is also contemplated in several of the Community programmes that have been promoted by the European Commission. **The main difficulty** of existing mobility-boosting schemes resides in the **large fragmentation** of these initiatives and their **lack of co-ordination**, leading to a **dispersion of resources**, which detracts from the efficacy of these programmes. **The creation of thematic networks of universities and the establishment of specific European programmes** for doctorate studies are some of the actions that have been **proposed to optimize** the initiatives already in progress and the better use of the resources allocated to mobility.

Likewise, the fostering of a **“European Doctorate” mention and its recognition as a guarantee of quality** in European university teaching systems is considered to be a priority.

At the same time, attention was drawn to the low mobility of university professors and the limited presence of specific professor mobility schemes in doctoral programmes based on in-house financial resources. In the majority of cases, the mobility of university professors is financed with supplementary aids and their participation in doctoral courses is secondary with respect to the objective of spending a period in the host university.

The establishment of **specific professor mobility programmes**, which also incorporate concrete bonuses, such as a reduction in the teaching load and economic assistance, is considered to be a **preferential objective of the short-term strategy for the improvement of Doctoral Studies in Europe**.

5. Openness:

A reflection on the obligation of fostering the opening up to the world of Europe's education and training systems, particularly Higher Education, concluded with the consideration that no university policy can be complete without a doctorate policy.

One of the European Council's mandates and an objective recognised by the Council of Education Ministers is to make European studies attractive to students from other regions. The European Union has a clear role to play in this context, if it is to compete with other geographical areas that are currently more competitive.

An increase in **multi-disciplinary studies** and the greater **flexibility** and **transversality** of Doctoral Studies are the recommendations that in this regard **would make these studies more attractive**. At the same time, the acceptance of the decisive influence that the **recognition of quality** has on the international projection of Doctorate Studies was unanimous. Hence, once again, the necessity of specific EU support for the programmes that entail the **European Doctorate mention** was underlined.

The new TEMPUS/MEDA programme presented by the European Commission was received very positively and the opportuneness of this and similar programmes with other regions, in which this co-operation is of special interest due to their special historic and cultural ties with Europe, such as Latin America and the Caribbean, was highlighted. The enormous potential for attracting students and professors from these regions towards Europe's Higher Education systems as centres of excellence was stressed, in addition to the possibility of expanding the traditional values of European culture to regions that are particularly sensitive to them.

The meeting expressed its satisfaction with the presentation at the next Summit of Heads of State and Government of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held on 17th and 18th May in Madrid, of an Action Plan for the period 2002/2004, presented by the Follow-Up Committee of the Declaration of Paris of 3rd November, 2000, which contains proposals for actions in these regions based on mobility and the quality assessment of Higher Education.

As a summary of the stated conclusions, the Presidency drew attention to the obligation, arising from the individual responsibilities of the assembled General Directors and Presidents of Rectors' Conferences of the EU/EEA, as the European Ministers of Education have already done, of being aware of the need to give a decided boost to Higher Education systems and, as part of them, European Doctoral Studies, so that they become an important focus of interest for all the other regions. The creation of the Common Higher Education Area and the constitution of the European Area of Knowledge cannot be a reality if the relevance and specificity of Doctoral Studies are not taken into account in these processes.

Similarly, the Presidency pointed out the obligation of contributing with determination to the overcoming of the difficulties and obstacles that have been identified for achieving a quality doctorate, as the ideal means of winning the recognition that is demanded for Doctoral Studies. In connection to this, several initiatives were presented relating to content, structure and implantation deadlines which should be adopted, to make sure that effective progress takes place towards the model that has been established as being necessary for achieving the objectives of quality, access and openness set by the European Council for the year 2010.

Lastly, the Presidency underlined the efficiency of this meeting and those of a more informal nature that are held simultaneously, in addition to the added they contribute in terms of encouraging contacts and exchanges of points of view, opinions and knowledge about what is being done in other countries. To no lesser extent, the Presidency also stressed the value of these meetings for establishing relations that facilitate collaboration between countries and the subsequent adoption of joint agreements and resolutions.



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The Presidency undertook to draft and send out to all participants a summary of the Conclusions and to include them in the Report of the Presidency to the Council of Education Ministers of 30th May.

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