

NEWSLETTER APRIL

Bologna Process Committee

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1. REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

1.1. The Newsletter

Welcome to read the April issue of the BPC Newsletter. It can be called as a spring edition since this time we have some more longer writings than usual.

This issue of the BPC Newsletter will bring you overview of the several seminars and meetings attended by the members of the BPC, country report about the higher education reform in Norway and special focus to the transparency in higher education. Updated calendar of activities is constantly renewing due to the several upcoming events.

On focus you can find two essentially important documents: Brussels Student Declaration, plus EUA and ESIB Joint Declaration.

All the comments, remarks and the info about the Bologna activities in several countries can be sent to the following address:

birgit@esib.org

1.2. National Student Seminar in Belgrade

On the 14th-17th of December 2001 the Student Union of Serbia organised a national seminar for more than 200 students. The topic of the seminar was student participation in the higher education reform in Serbia. The discussions in the seminar circulated around enrolment policy, tuition fees, curricula, grading system, quality assurance, corruption in universities, university management and alternative education. The higher education system in Serbia is in these years going through great changes, and the new reform is on it's way. This seminar gathered the student vision on the future education system of Serbia. The policy paper "The desired university", which was produced as the conclusion of the seminar, is being distributed to university teachers and most students in Serbia. It identifies education as the only way towards development of the society and the country. The seminar thereby set the general guidelines for student participation in the reforms and it prepared the students for the upcoming work with these reforms. Judging by the present situation work on this field is going to be very hard. Higher education in Serbia is facing a transition period in its development from the old-fashioned education system toward modern higher education promoted by the Bologna process. Students in the seminar proved that they are aware of the problems of the higher education in Serbia but also of the need for change. They also proved that they have a vision on what the reformed university should look like, and what students should do to make their own contribution to the reform of their universities. This was one of the initial moves in the reform work and there is still a long way to go. Student Union of Serbia will continue working on the reforms and plan more seminars and actions concerning student participation in higher education reforms.

1.3. ENQA, EUA, ESIB meeting

On January 14th there was a meeting as part of a project on developing European co-operation in quality assurance – this was the second meeting of its kind. This project is a joint initiative of ENQA, EUA and ESIB and it aims to create a comprehensive outline on quality assurance by bringing together the key actors in this field. The first meeting was held in September and since then there have been three smaller working groups looking at "quality assurance and accreditation", "quality assurance and recognition" and "future scenarios". The discussions at the January meeting were based on the papers produced by these working groups.

The first group looked at the link between quality assurance and recognition. ENQA outlined the creation of a working group between themselves and the ENIC/NARIC networks on the topic that was set up in December. There were suggestions that EUA and ESIB should join the ENIC/NARIC/ENQA workgroup – thereby linking the two working groups. In the second group there were some good discussions on how to best use and further work on the experiences that have been made in the fields of quality assurance – especially in the Nordic countries. The final working group was looking at a more ideal and utopian situation in the future and trying to come up with "future scenarios". In this session quality assurance was divided into three main areas: the creation of a quality culture, accountability and transparency. It was concluded that there is a clear link between future scenarios and the current situation and this group therefore need to work closely with the second working group. These three groups, "quality assurance and accreditation", "quality assurance and recognition" and "future scenarios", will continue to work separately until the next meeting in June where there will be discussions on how to combine these three groups.

1.4. Transparency for European Higher Education

This official Bologna process seminar was held by the Spanish presidency for the European Union.

Two block of sessions focused for the transparency and accreditation. Main stake holders in the Bologna process (EUA, ESIB ENQA, Commission) presented their activities and future expectations in the field of quality assurance and accreditation, as well as key factors for achieving more transparency in higher education.

It was more an information exchange seminar than conclusion making. Nevertheless key tools to reach more transparency in higher education are:

- Developing similar systems of assessment;
- Converging higher education structures;
- Establishing mutual recognition procedures;
- Developing a common model of accreditation.

As Spanish authorities mentioned, this seminar helped them to develop more transparency in their higher education structure and start the discussion about quality assurance systems in Spain. For more information www.jornalquality.com

1.5. Joint ESIB Working Group Meeting

On the 14th to 16th of February ESIBs Social Affairs and Mobility working groups met in Opatija, Croatia. The meeting was organised in co-operation between the Croatian, German, Maltese and Slovenian national student unions. In all there were all together representatives from 14 countries and more than 30 students.

The main theme of the meeting was Vertical Mobility, which means that a student studies for a full degree in a foreign country. When discussing obstacles to vertical mobility the main issues are tuition fees, grants/loans, transferability of grants/loans, access to services in local student unions, social services in general and whether foreign students treated equally to local students.

The general discussion and brainstorming in Opatija will be processed further and a policy paper on the subject will be worked on for the ESIB board meeting in May.

1.6. Dubrovnik Student Convention

The fourth European Student Convention was held in Dubrovnik, Croatia between the 20th and 23rd of March.

The main topic of the convention was Recognition and the goals of the convention were preparation of ESIB representatives for the experts meeting organised by Council of Europe in April in Lisbon, Portugal, as well as supplying national representatives with relevant and useful information on different aspects of the recognition issues. To achieve these goals workshops addressed specific aspects of recognition and the relation between recognition and accreditation, labour market, non-formal education and transnational education. The discussions reflected very much on the national situations and, apart giving input for the Lisbon meeting, giving the participants the more practical knowledge for the coming discussions on recognition on the national level, but also in the national and local student unions.

The final panel of the convention was a discussion on barriers to student mobility in South East Europe. In this panel the students stressed the importance of fully including the all of South East European countries into the Commission's exchange programmes.

1.7. Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process

At the second Ministerial meeting in the Bologna Process (Praha, 18 - 19 May 2001), the Ministers in their communiqué included a list of activities and issues to be addressed in time for the next Ministerial meeting, to be held in Berlin in September 2003. One of the issues identified concerns the recognition of qualifications and the use of credit transfer.

The Council of Europe, in cooperation with UNESCO and the Portuguese authorities, addressed this important topic at an international seminar which was held in Lisbon, at the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, on 11 - 12 April 2002. The dates of the seminar were chosen to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, adopted in Lisbon on 11 April 1997.

Outcome of the seminar were recommendations to: higher education institutions, academic networks, ENIC and NARIC networks, governments, across the EU and ministers, stressing the need to ensure the implementation of the recognition issues in the Bologna process. For the whole document see: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural/Education/Higher%5Feducation/Activities/Bologna_Process/LisbonRecommendations.asp#TopOfPage

2. ARTICLE

2.1. Transparency: Position of the Students

Introduction
ESIB has always seen the transparency as the key basis of every reform, single change in higher educational field, both in national and European level. Students, believe that only mutual co-operation between stakeholders can bring us closer to the purposes of the Bologna Process.

1. Need for transparency
Our national higher education system has to be transparent to co-operate in European and together compete in global level. That is why we have Bologna Process. Inconsistent with the process higher education systems are becoming increasingly complex and heterogeneous.

Institutions of higher education should contribute to transparency and recognition by explaining their programmes and the competency they strive for in a way that is meaningful for students and employers.

But are students enough informed or do we need more information about/from the institutions?

Does higher educational system operates behind a brick wall of questionable systems, bewildering practices and dubious decisions?

2. Enhancing transparency

According to ESIB policy papers main key factors to enhance transparency are:

2.1. Free and equal access to higher education
ESIB believes that the free and equal access to higher education is fundamentally linked to the systems of financial support for students, across the EU. Many countries have already reform their higher education mainly by introducing bachelor-master degrees, but still many countries are not doing so. Governments need to recognize their role of being the primary investors in higher education and student welfare. They need to recognize that financial support for students is an investment in the state's, whole Europe future. We believe that a strong system of student grants is the best system for assuring the students required financial means.

We see the role of higher education institutions in providing students with the knowledge and the skills they require in life. Higher education institutions are not only promoting students' employability but are in fact promoting personal development, citizenship education and critical thinking. The institutions need to recognize and strengthen this role.

2.2. Degree system

Adoption of the degree system in Europe essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, can increase the transparency of different degree systems. Many countries have already reform their higher education mainly by introducing bachelor-master degrees, but still many countries are in the doubts. While countries where degrees take a long time fear switching to the bachelor's will degrade their education, places with shorter-duration programmes worry that their degrees won't be recognised as high quality.

Does it make current situation clearer? Transparency will come mostly when those students who entered or will enter higher education previous or current year finally graduate. Employers are informed about changes, new degrees and new qualifications, and from now along their expectations are different. Only group who does not seem to benefit is currently studying students. There are differences in study period, curricula, in some countries even in social support system.

Employability is the important goal of the education, but should not determine too much the content of the studies. Even though it is highly important to vertical mobility the main issues are tuition fees, grants/loans, transferability of grants/loans, access to services in local student unions, social services in general and whether foreign students treated equally to local students.

2.3. Recognition of studies
ECTS is a credit transfer system that could be a way to enhance academic recognition, and thus mobility of students, if implemented correctly. This however is not the case. A real European Credit System should be applicable outside Socrates programme network and have both the components of transfer and accumulation.

This system must be naturally inter-linked with the issues of accreditation and the comparable system degrees and thus facilitate academic pre-recognition. European Credit System must strengthen the transparency and internal compatibility of the European Higher Education area. It will provide students, teachers, institutions and society as whole with the necessary information.

The information about gained credits itself can be in a simple way be included in the Diploma Supplement. Since a diploma supplement is only supplied when getting a degree there is a need to have Certificates of Credits on intermediary levels. This will support the value of gained credits without the framework of a degree.

2.4. Student mobility

Real student mobility is the possibility to choose where and what a student wants to study and having the proper academic recognition. To learn from different cultures but also to share one's culture with others gives students a wider perspective and a better preparation to life. Mobility itself is an learning experience.

In order to achieve this higher education institutions should be proactive in finding more partners (networking), build professional structures to cope with all the international challenges and facilitating students needs. Students from different countries should have equal opportunities, even if that means positive discrimination of less favoured countries.

Student participation at every level of decision making of mobility programmes is very important. It is also important that students participate in the promotion of mobility, but they should complement and not substitute the responsibilities of institutions.

2.5. Student participation

Students are an equally important and integral part of higher educational community. Students must be seen as partners who are in the centre of interest of the higher educational institutions.

Students have a right to have an equal input in all issues concerning them at all the levels of decision making. At institutional level, students must have the right to take part in decisions making as equal partners in all issues. That is right to be enshrined in law. At national and international levels students must have the right to participate in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of decisions concerning students including education and students welfare and any other affairs that students see relevant.

2.6. Quality Assurance and Accreditation

The Bologna Process brings along a lot of dangers. One of them is the lowering of quality. The European dimension in quality assurance foreseen in the Bologna Declaration is therefore a vital aspect. The goal of this European dimension in quality assurance is to achieve transparency of national quality assurance systems, not to replace them. Not all countries managed to build up their own strong quality assurance systems and therefore the loser in this case is an improvement of education.

Accreditation should enhance the transparency and the objectivity of higher education by looking at minimum criteria and standards for higher education. To get actual transparency and objective accreditation it should be done by an independent organisation – independent from the government and the institutions.

For ESIB however quality assurance is a pre-requisite, pre-condition to accreditation. If there are no quality assurance systems in place accreditation should not even be considered.

Conclusion

It is necessary to repeat that transparency in higher education can be achieved only in co-operation between students, institutions and other stakeholders.

Therefore we, students, should encourage other stake holders to trust students and to involve us an equal basis as partners in this process.

3. COUNTRY REPORT

3.1. Reform on Higher Education in Norway by Mats Larssen, NSU

Introduction
First of all, this is not a detailed article outlining the higher education systems in Norway. Such a task would be to too time-consuming and full of details. The purpose of this article is to give a short introduction to the reform on higher education in Norway. If you need further, more specific information then please contact me via e-mail.

Secondly, you should be aware of the fact that there is two National Union of Students' in Norway: NSU and SLL. I represent NSU, which is representing students at the Universities and many of the Scientific Colleges in the country.

Background - The Why and Where

The 30th of April 1998, Professor Ole D. Mjøs was named leader of a project group, whose mandate was nothing less than to completely evaluate the higher education system in Norway. The project laboured for 2 years. Mjøs presented, 8th of May 2000, a report on higher education in Norway, consisting of 700 pages. Apart from being huge enough to be used as a weapon, it included a lot of suggestions on how to improve higher education in Norway.

The suggestions were quite radical - a voucher-based financing system for the students, presidents/principals and deans should be elected, and not elected, higher education institutions should not be organised as a part of the state, more intense and demanding studies and so on. All in all, their suggestions made it look like higher education should become (more) like private institutions. This made a lot of people feel that Mjøs would sell the soul of higher education to commercialisation.

A year later, the Social-Democratic government in Norway released its view on what actions should be taken in regards to the higher education system in Norway. They had toned down the most marked-oriented views presented by Mjøs (presidents/principals are to be elected, deans shall be elected, voucher-based financing system for the students and so on). The government also listened to the NUS' to such an extent that they were accused of being too student friendly, which resulted in that some professors got quite angry.

The reform was voted for in Parliament on the 12th of June 2001. The Parliament made changes to some of the suggestions from the government, but kept most of them.

The time has now come to implement this reform, and to make it work. The Ministry of Education and Research in Norway has 19 different project groups, that all work on different parts of the reform. Some of the project groups are not very interesting in a student perspective, and some of them are very interesting. Generally, the NUS' participate in the projects they find interesting, and they are still an important player on the board.

So, Where is the Problem?

That was a brief history of the reform. Hopefully you have read this far, and you are probably starting to wonder when the content of this reform is going to be mentioned. But first of all, I have to mention one thing about the trends in European higher education that has prompted this.

Bologna and Prague have drawn important lines as to where higher education in Europe shall go, and the reform in Norway has taken this into account. Hence the reform is meant to internationalise higher education in Norway.

Below is a few of the major points listed. As a part of the reform, Norway is going to:

- Develop Bachelor- and Master Degrees, which will be 3 and 2 years respectively.
- Upgrade grading ranging from A-F, closely mirroring ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), but without the Gauss-curve.
- Make Diploma Supplement an option for all students that want it.
- Make an option for every student to take at least one semester abroad.
- Demand that every higher education institution have a quality assurance system, and have a Centre for Accreditation and Evaluation which job will be to quality assure higher education institutions.
- Evaluate and optimise every study program to make sure that the quality is as high as it should be.
- Give the institutions freedom to be able to react to a changing society.
- Make a better financing system for students, to make students able to study full time, without having to take a job on the side.

Conclusion
This is a short summary of what the reform is all about, and as you have probably guessed, there is a lot more. As I mentioned earlier, send me an e-mail if you would like some more specific information about the reform.

4. FOCUS

4.1. Brussels Student Declaration

ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe (hereafter referred to as ESIB) and EUA – European University Association (hereafter referred to as EUA), representing more than 10 million students, 32 rectors' conferences and 600 universities or equivalent institutions across the whole of Europe, are pleased to announce the signing of the Brussels Declaration on the future of Higher Education in Europe. Universities are acknowledged as the main platform in which dialogue and learning between the generations take place. While students have always embraced their role in promoting reform and development, future work must be undertaken in broader partnerships. This can only strengthen the role that higher education plays in shaping and contributing towards civic society.

Students, Universities and Europe

The importance of universities and students working together at local, regional, national and European level is clear. The future of Europe depends upon the ability to differentiate university and non-university type of studies. There are an increasingly high number of students in Eastern Europe. Both EUA and ESIB therefore signal their willingness to work together on issues of importance to the implementation of the Laeken Convention on the future of the European Union, to make a significant contribution on the changing role of higher education in an increasingly inter-connected global society. Students have a unique contribution to make in the consultation of civil society that is being planned as part of the Laeken process.

EUA and ESIB are committed to joint action at the European level. While the following are current priorities – the construction of the European Higher Education Area and the globalisation process – EUA and ESIB will also discuss, further to this declaration, common fields of interest in achieving the "Europe of knowledge".

European Higher Education Area

The creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is an important objective which both EUA and ESIB support and towards which we are already contributing fully. All key stakeholders must be involved in the process. Now that the creation of the EHEA is entering the implementation phase, the active participation of universities and students is of increased importance. ESIB and EUA are both taking a pro-active approach to inform, encourage and support our members in this respect. We are also both fully involved at European level in the various groups and fora preparing the next stages of the EHEA.

The creation of the European Higher Education Area implies the reform of some aspects of traditional existing practices in many countries of Europe. We would like to draw attention to the following issues:

• **Mobility**
Increased and more flexible mobility of students and university staff is a fundamental building block for the EHEA. Much work has already been done to identify and remove barriers to mobility. We encourage the implementation of the Mobility Action Plan developed under the French Presidency of the EU to meet and exceed the targets established by the European Commission.

• **Improving quality mechanisms**
Effective and transparent quality assurance mechanisms are necessary in order to ensure mutual trust and confidence across European higher education, thus facilitating the recognition of qualifications, degrees and credits for both academic and employment purposes. Quality assurance mechanisms must also look to enhance the overall student experience (eg student support services and extra-curricular development). Taken together these factors should foster a quality culture within institutions and across the EHEA.

• **A European credit accumulation and transfer system**
The development of a European Higher Education Area, our goal is to remove barriers to recognition and credit accumulation to the extent that institutions can pre-recognise existing qualifications using an agreed code of practise that serves the interest of students and protects the autonomy of institutions.

• **Social Issues**
Higher education in Europe should be democratic and accessible for all. Social issues are central to the creation of the EHEA. These include a thorough and comprehensive student support system, eg counselling, financial support, work rights and practical legal advice. To achieve equality of opportunity in an increasingly diverse university population, such a system must ensure maximum flexibility.

• **Links with the European Research Area**
The creation of a European Higher Education Area should not be separated from the development of a European Research Area (ERA). Integrated learning, teaching and research is essential to the European vision of a democratic and dynamic university system, and the construction of EHEA and ERA should therefore be regarded as aspects of a common process.

• **South Eastern Europe**
The creation of the European Higher Education Area must be a truly European process in order to gain the benefits of our continent's diversity. We do not consider the South Eastern Europe as a peripheral region in this process, but fully involved as an integral partner. The full inclusion of South Eastern Europe and removal of barriers to mobility. We encourage the implementation of the Mobility Action Plan developed under the French Presidency of the EU to meet and exceed the targets established by the European Commission.

Europe and the globalisation process

Whilst global competition might be seen as a way to enhance the overall quality of the higher education sector, the principles behind cooperation in the EHEA and with other systems of higher education should be based on educational solidarity.

Both EUA and ESIB share the opinion that education is a public good to the individuals and societies, and not solely a tradable service. We consider that current attempts to extend commitments in Higher Education through the GATS framework are not in the best interests of higher education institutions, students or society. Education is a fundamental human right. Higher education should not be reduced to a commodity, and any attempt to do so would be an essential element for the success of the Stabilisation and Accession Process leading to EU membership. However, a system of regulations must be developed from within the higher education community.

Conclusion

We affirm that ESIB and EUA are ready to contribute not only to the construction of the European Higher Education Area but more generally to the development of tomorrow's Europe, in which our members and constituents will play a leading, formative role.

5. CALENDAR OF EVENTS

5.1. Calendar of Activities

Date	Place	Event
27-28 April	Roskilde, Denmark	EUA seminar Authority and quality assurance – the challenge for institutions www.uniqe.ch/eua/
13 – 18 May	Warsaw, Poland	ESIB international seminar The role of students in the process of European integration – the vision of the future of the continent www.esib.org
16-17 May	Galway, Ireland	EURASHE – Coherence in European Higher Education www.eurashe.be/news/ann-conf.htm
18 - 21 May	Warsaw, Poland	ESIB – 42 nd Board Meeting www.esib.org
23-24 May	Santander, Spain	Enlarged Follow-up Meeting
27-28 May	Copenhagen, Denmark	ENQA general assembly www.enqa.net
30-31 May	Stockholm, Sweden	Swedish Gov. - International conference on Joint degrees
27 June	Brussels, Belgium	ENQA-EUA-ESIB working group meeting
June	Netherlands	Feed back on standards BaMa to governments and accrediting body in NI and FI
11-12 October	Zurich, Switzerland	EUA – Swiss Rectors Conference Conference on ECTS – The Challenge for Institutions
14 – 17 October	Finland	ESIB international seminar Student Welfare
17 – 20 October	Finland	ESIB – 43 rd Board Meeting
October/November	Prague, Czech Republic	Meeting of the Regional Central and Eastern European Sub-network of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
21 – 24 November	Copenhagen, Denmark	European Student Convention (ESIB – DSF)
2003		
Beginning of 2003	Denmark	Contribution from Higher Education to Lifelong Learning
17-18 February 2003	Athens - Greece	Seminar on the Social Dimension of the Higher Education Area
February 2003	Helsinki - Finland	Seminar about Master Degrees
Spring 2003	Italy	Seminar on Integrated Programmes
12-14 June 2003	Oslo - Norway	Student Involvement in the ongoing process
18-19 September 2003	Berlin - Germany	Follow-up of Bologna/Prague Meetings www.bologna-berlin2003.de