
EURASHE POLICY STATEMENT ON THE BOLOGNA-PRAGUE-BERLIN PROCESS

1. INTRODUCTION

EURASHE is an international educational association whose aims include the promotion of the interests of European higher education institutions within the sector of Colleges/Polytechnics and University level institutions devoted to professional education and applied research. It welcomes and supports the general thrust of the Bologna and Prague Declarations to establish a European area of higher education. It, also, welcomes EURASHE's representation on the Bologna Preparatory Group for the next summit of European Ministers for Education in Berlin 2003, where it hopes to bring to that group the distinct views, aspirations and vision of the sector of higher education it represents at European level. To that end, it sets out hereunder a discussion document covering a number of key elements in the Bologna Declaration which are of particular importance to the sector represented by EURASHE.

2. ADOPTION OF TWO MAIN CYCLES OF HIGHER EDUCATION - Undergraduate and Postgraduate

EURASHE supports the proposed two-cycle framework provided it does not seek to impose a rigid uniform model that would exclude sub-degree studies which have long been recognised as higher education in many European countries. Courses of two-years duration and/or their part-time equivalents in ECTS credits are an integral part of the higher education qualifications system in some European countries and they remain a key element in the enhancement of transfer possibilities towards further study within lifelong learning scenarios.

3. EMPLOYABILITY

Recently thorough social and economic changes have become clear in our societies. To mention only some, there is the globalisation of the economy, the huge growth and quick renewal of information and knowledge, the ICT and the growth of multi-cultural societies. Due to those fundamental changes education, in particular higher education, is confronted with new challenges. There is the shift from knowledge to competences, the importance of managerial and social-communicative competences such as critical thought and problem solving, the ability to seek, handle and evaluate information, the ability to be a team player, the ability to act appropriately in the context of whatever social-cultural environment the graduate finds himself.

The relevance of programmes to the labour market has always been a core value and finds expression in the mission statements of most institutions in the

College/Polytechnic Sector. The course accreditation assessment and examination systems in many institutions in this sector reflect the influence of industry, business and the professions on the character of educational provision. In the College/Polytechnic Sector, it is not uncommon for peer review experts, extern examiners etc. to be drawn from the world of work.

The main challenge facing institutions in this sector, as the labour market becomes more sophisticated and volatile, is to avoid too narrow a vocationalism and to equip graduates with the flexibility to operate in a changing environment. We therefore propose to use the term “professional” instead of “vocational” to refer to that kind of studies. Inherent in the Bologna understanding of graduate employability is not only the technical skills and competences to do the task, but, also, such endemic competences as are necessary to manage the modern labour market.

The bridging of the gap between the social/cultural objectives and those of employability poses a major challenge for institutions and policymakers within higher education. The building of a European Higher Education area, as envisaged under the Bologna Process, requires attention to this area and an attempt to share values and outcomes, not only trans-nationally but also, between different types of higher education institutions.

4. LIFELONG LEARNING

Many of the institutions which EURASHE represents in what is often referred to as the College/Polytechnic Sector have a long and proud tradition in the provision of part-time, continuing and second chance education for those within the communities they serve, particularly at local and regional levels. Such education includes a wide range of educational provision, including full-time and part-time courses for older adults leading to qualifications, as well as short vocational or other courses provided for people who feel they can benefit from them. The institutions we represent carry within them the experience and understanding of issues that equip them to meet the challenges of Lifelong Learning, which sees all learning as a seamless continuum from “cradle to grave”. Our institutions fully embrace the view expressed in the EU Commission memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) that “Lifelong Learning” is necessary not only to ensure the employability and personal fulfilment of current and future generations but to ensure their inclusion in society and to promote their active citizenship. In order to give effect to this concept, higher education institutions must recognize Lifelong Learning as an integral part of its provision and assert academic ownership of it as a mainstream or core part of its activities. The furthering of the Bologna Process requires that attention be given to embracing the concept of Lifelong Learning by all higher education institutions with the consequential outcomes of alternative learning paths, new types of students/learners and new forms of course delivery systems all leading to qualifications recognized and endorsed by the core academic regulatory authorities of the institutions. In order to advance the process of Lifelong Learning within institutions, the following are of importance:

- * Recognition that the changes necessary to meet the challenges of Lifelong Learning are pedagogical as well as organisational for Institutions.

- * Lecturing staff and senior administrative staff involved in Lifelong Learning require training to equip them deal with challenges arising from new types of students, new delivery methods often using ICT and new staff-student relationships.
- * Flexibility in terms of course structures, admissions, recognition of prior learning as well as prior experiential learning is essential to meet the challenges arising from the new types of student.
- * The adoption of a credit accumulation system, such as ECTS as proposed under Bologna, is an essential tool to meet the challenges posed by Lifelong Learning.
- * Given the nature of many of the students engaged in Lifelong Learning - the institutions require increased guidance and support systems to assist learners.

The challenge at European level is to get the co-operation across all types of higher education institutions to place Lifelong Learning as a central core activity in their operations. EURASHE believes that, through networks established not only trans-nationally but between different types of institutions, strategies can be developed to meet the challenges of Lifelong Learning inherent in the Bologna Process.

5. DIVERSITY versus CONVERGENCE

While the Bologna Declaration calls for greater convergence in European higher education, some may feel that institutional diversification, so revered in many countries, may be threatened. EURASHE's experience, however, has been that while many of the institutions it represents have continued to expand and diversify and, in many instances, have formed linkages and co-operative arrangements with universities at regional and national levels, their missions and core values have not been adversely effected. EURASHE would support the observation in the OECD Report (1998) - Redefining Tertiary Education - which comments that it is less important whether countries have a unitary or a binary structure than that learners be provided with a diversity of learning structures, pathways and programmes, sufficiently interrelated to permit ready movement between them. EURASHE believes that the institutions it represents can, while maintaining their identity and core values, play their part in constructing a European Higher Education Area so that its citizens can enjoy mutual recognition of their qualifications, mobility in their employment and a real European outlook and dimension to their daily lives.
