

The Bologna Process: Trends 2010 – A decade of change in European Higher Education

Description

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The [Bologna Process](#) is pressing on with its agenda of enhanced student mobility, standardisation of degrees and credit transfer, as well as quality assurance in order to promote institutional competition amongst its 46 participating countries. But as new countries [contemplate membership](#), it is important to evaluate what the last ten years have achieved under this ambitious implementation programme.

The [European University Association](#) recently published [Trends 2010](#) which examines a decade of higher education in the context of the Bologna and outlines their goal for the future. Here are a few highlights, taken directly from the 100 –page report.

Overview

– Overall participation rates in higher education have increased by 25% on average between 1998 and 2006 – or as in Poland where enrolment increased by 90% during this period – albeit with significant differences across countries and across disciplines, with science and technology fields losing their attractiveness. (18)

– A recent study revealed that the number of 10-14 year olds in the EU is expected to fall by 15% between 2000 and 2020, resulting in a drastic reduction of the school-going population (Eurydice 2009), with a potential domino effect on higher education. The professoriate in higher education is greying and the “baby boom” generation is going into retirement. Because these trends are uneven within a country (causing rural brain drain in some) and across Europe, they may lead to an exacerbated “brain war” for students and academic staff, within Europe, at a time when the global competition for talents is heating up and international ranking schemes are proliferating and forcing institutional leaders to rethink their positioning within the global higher education community (19).

– The concept of academic freedom is changing – some say eroding – because academics are pressured to be successful in seeking funding for their research to match the research strategies and priorities of their institutions (22)

Implementation – Degree Structure – implementation of the three-cycle system which commences with the Bachelor’s

– A large majority of institutions have implemented the new Bologna degree structure: from 53% of institutions in 2003 to 95% in 2010. In some cases, however, the change has not led to meaningful curricular renewal, but rather to compressed Bachelor degrees that leave little flexibility for students (7).

– There is also concern in some countries, such as Austria, Germany and Portugal, which

have reduced the duration of their Bachelor degrees to three years, that this is making it difficult to include periods of mobility or internships and to achieve student engagement (40).

–Â Â Â Â Â Several site visit reports suggest that institutions, academics and students in some countries are far from convinced of the value of the Bologna first cycle and of its acceptance by employers (40).

–Â Â Â Â Â Assuming no change on this front, the Bachelor is likely to remain relatively disregarded by the labour market until such time as its place in national qualifications frameworks becomes established (43).

Looking beyond 2010

–Â Â Â Â Â Quality Assurance â?? Identified as the most pressing development that will most affect higher education institutions in 5 yearsâ?? time (90)â??many quality procedures are in place, often managed at faculty rather than at institutional level. As a result, there is wider ownership of quality processes and the concept of quality culture is reaching down but there is not always a clear feedback loop to the institutionâ??s strategic orientation (87).

–Â Â Â Â Â Internationalisation has been identified by HEIs as the third, most important change driver in the past three years and is expected to move to first place within the next five years (8).

–Â Â Â Â Â For the past three years, the change agenda has shifted to the more complex, less quantifiable issues of cultural change and embedding the structural changes and individual Bologna tools in institutions. At the same time, given the rapid transformation of higher education in many countries, issues of institutional governance, leadership and strategic development have grown in importance. Thus, when institutions are asked which developments will most affect them in five yearsâ?? time, only 15% mention the Bologna Process (90).