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The Bologna Process Independent Assessment

**The first decade of working on the
European Higher Education Area**

Volume 1 Detailed assessment report

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The Bologna Process Independent Assessment reports

The consortium of CHEPS, INCHER-Kassel and ECOTEC have made an assessment of major elements of first decade of the Bologna Process in order to obtain an independent view on the progress of the Bologna Process.

The study is published in two volumes online, **the current detailed assessment report** (volume 1) and the case studies and appendices (volume 2). They are available on http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm and through the CHEPS website: www.utwente.nl/cheps/publications.

The Executive summary together with the overview and assessment sections has also been published separately.



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Executive Summary

Aims of the assessment study

This assessment study was contracted out by the European Commission and the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), to assess the extent to which the *operational objectives* of the Bologna Declaration of 1999 and subsequent communiqués have been achieved in the areas of curriculum reform, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition, mobility and social equity. It also evaluated the extent to which the operational objectives have led to the achievement of the *strategic objectives* of the Bologna Declaration, i.e. ‘to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide’. The management of the Bologna Process was also included in the study. An international consortium of researchers undertook the project from 2008-2009. The study is *not* an evaluation of the *entire* Bologna Process as not all aspects of the process were identified as focal areas for the study.

Assessments were made against official statements of goals in the selected action areas taken from the Bologna Declaration and subsequent communiqués; the study was therefore limited to the collective level of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to national implementation. Experiences of higher education institutions or of students could only be glimpsed intermittently.

Overall assessment

Overall, higher education across the 46 EHEA countries looks substantially different from 10 years ago—perhaps with the exception of the social dimension. Most ‘architectural’ elements of the EHEA, i.e. those involving legislation and national regulation, have been implemented in most countries. The impact of the established architecture on substantive goal achievement at the level of higher education institutions and study programmes is still wanting; however, institution-level impacts are not easily shown in our assessment of goal achievement at the level of the EHEA and countries.

The extent to which the key objectives of compatibility, comparability and attractiveness will be achieved is still partly an open question. First, it is too early to answer the question because achieving some of the desired outcomes will require many years of post-implementation experience (especially labour market effects and effects involving all three cycles). Second, even among highly performing countries, compatibility and comparability have not yet been fully achieved. Third, the operation of the intergovernmental process has emphasised policy initiatives and plans: the crucial question about outcomes of the process in terms of its key objectives (compatibility, comparability, attractiveness) has not been addressed to the same extent.

Most of the 46 countries have adopted new higher education legislation to introduce and regulate elements of the Bologna Process. Many countries have allocated additional funds for the implementation of new Bologna policies. The European Commission has also supported projects for the introduction of reforms.

There is a large difference in the speed of implementation between individual countries. While some countries have shown considerable progress in implementing almost all action areas, other countries have still to start on some. This creates a European Higher Education Area of different speeds of implementation and varying levels of commitment. Even the most ‘advanced’ countries have struggled with the implementation of at least one of the Bologna elements: there is no case of high performance across *all* elements. Newcomer countries (17 countries joined in 2001–2005, mostly in the East and South-East of the region) had to struggle to catch up with many—though not all—of the early starters.

The countries participating in the Bologna Process faced different challenges in their higher education systems, ranging from inefficiencies (e.g. high drop-out rates, low participation rates across a variety of dimensions) to limited systemic flexibility, and upgrading quality during rapid expansion. These different starting points, coupled to different management and governance arrangements, meant that the implementation of national reforms deviated from Bologna intentions. Divergence has been strengthened by the fact that key actors in different countries interpreted elements of the Bologna reform agenda differently.

In national implementation policies, the involvement of stakeholders in various stages of the policy process has had a positive impact, as have strong links between national and European-level actors. Where higher education systems were already in line with some elements of the Bologna ‘model’ (e.g. degree structure, qualifications frameworks), countries were able to focus more swiftly on in-depth implementation issues. A balanced mixture of supporting policy mechanisms (funding, regulation, policies in other areas, communication and information exchange) appeared to be crucial to the successful implementation of Bologna reforms.

Especially amongst countries that were relatively new to the Bologna process, a lack of resources and expertise to guide and influence the domestic policy process and subsequent implementation were significant handicaps.

Achieving the European Area of Higher Education

In all EHEA countries, many learners now have the option to continue second or third cycle studies in other institutions in the same country or in other EHEA countries. Yet establishing a fully transparent higher education area requires further efforts in the areas of recognition and student support.

Student mobility within the EHEA did not increase substantially in the period up to 2007 (the latest year for which comparable statistics were available). The main change between 1999 and 2007 was from short-term credit mobility (by ‘free movers’ and learners moving within the framework of European, national or regional programmes) to degree mobility. There was an absolute rise of 39%, equalling a relative increase of 4% (relative increase takes the growth of the student population into account) to the point where 2.0% of EHEA learners were pursuing a degree in another EHEA country. There is an east-to-west imbalance of student mobility within Europe. The imbalance may call the sustainability of student mobility into question.

Promoting the European system of higher education world-wide

Mobility from other parts of the world towards the EHEA has increased substantially and faster than international mobility has grown worldwide. Together, the EHEA countries attracted 30% of the world's foreign learners in 2007. Yet for internationally mobile learners the EHEA has little reality; they choose to study in countries and institutions without considering if they are part of the EHEA. Equally the EHEA is not seen as an area providing a uniform level of higher education degrees and the USA remains the most prestigious destination, attracting the top tier of learners (e.g. from China).

Cooperation of different types between higher education institutions from EHEA countries and counterparts abroad (e.g. Africa, Latin America) has increased.

The Bologna Process has become a major focus of attention for regional and sometimes also national higher education policy-making around the world (e.g. in China and in the USA).

Assessments of action areas

Degree and curriculum reform

All countries have adopted two-/three-cycle degree systems, with a range of 180–240 credits (in ECTS) for the first and 60–120 credits for the second degree. This goal has thus been fully achieved. The combination '180+120' credits (or in years of full-time study: '3+2') emerged as the prominent model in Europe, while there is flexibility to accommodate variations of the model. However, the percentage of learners studying in two-cycle programmes was below 50% in six systems, including two large countries (Germany, Russia). Partly this reflects ongoing transition, especially in the four countries that joined the Bologna Process recently, but may indicate problems with the degree reforms if these percentages do not rise quickly.

Doctoral degrees have become more structured than before the Bologna Declaration in many countries; a diversity of models continues to exist as intended, and a nominal length of 3-4 years is the most common duration.

Short-cycle degrees of different nature, (mostly) connected to different cycles, were maintained or introduced in 26 countries' higher education systems.

All higher education systems use the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), are in transition towards it, or use ECTS-compatible systems. This goal has been substantially achieved at the level of regulation, but the degree of use of ECTS in institutions and programmes needs attention, as well as linking allocation of credits to student workload and learning outcomes, which has been attained in only 12 higher education systems. In 13 systems 90% or more of study programmes have been modularised and there is no common understanding of the concept of 'modularisation' as a tool to foster mobility, flexibility and transferability. Curriculum reform has only been partly achieved and needs attention.

Quality assurance

The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance have been adopted (2005). The Register of quality assessment agencies (EQAR) is established and operative (2008). All countries except one apply internal and external quality assurance on a system-wide scale; the extent to which these quality assurance systems (also in the higher education institutions) substantially comply with the ESG must be evaluated in the coming years. Applying compatible quality assurance systems does not guarantee the delivery of compatible quality of education. The latter must result from combining meaningful learning outcomes (ECTS) and qualifications frameworks (QF-EHEA and NQF).

The perceived diversity between countries in the quality of education being delivered needs to be reduced to achieve a coherent higher education system in the EHEA.

Qualifications frameworks

An overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) has been adopted (2005). Eight higher education systems have self-certified national qualification frameworks; the others should be finished by 2012. The extension of the deadline (originally it was 2010) shows that more effort is needed.

Actual impact of the qualifications frameworks (QF-EHEA and national qualifications frameworks) and the recent developments in quality assurance (the ESG) on the quality of higher education will depend on curriculum reform by higher education institutions.

Recognition policies

All Bologna countries except two have signed or ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC); five have signed and ratified the LRC but their legislation is not in compliance with the LRC and 39 countries have signed and ratified the LRC and their legislation complies with the provisions of the LRC. This progress in (almost) achieving the official adoption of the LRC has shifted the discussion to realising the impacts intended by the measures. There are different interpretations of ‘substantial differences’ and other terms and practices around recognition, in particular the use of learning outcomes as a determinant for recognition. While room for interpretation is necessary, this creates uncertainty and requires more attention.

The Diploma Supplement is issued automatically and free of charge in most higher education institutions in 30 out of 46 countries. This needs further attention in the other 16 countries and in the remaining higher education institutions in the 30 countries. Awareness of the existence and meaning of the Diploma Supplement among learners and employers needs to be improved.

Policies for flexibility and widened participation: the social dimension

Since targeted social dimension actions started only recently in the Bologna Process, we can only give a short overview of the current situation. 39 higher education systems report underrepresentation of certain groups in their student body. Most commonly underrepresented groups include those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and people coming to higher education through non-traditional educational routes. Female

learners are underrepresented in science and technology programmes in almost all countries, as well as in the second and third cycles of studies.

Policies suitable to widen participation and successful completion of studies such as recognition of prior learning (RPL), flexible study modes, counselling for learners and financial aid are available to varying degrees in varying numbers of countries (around one third would be the typical proportion for each of these policies). From the few available data, we could not conclude that these policies have been introduced with the aim of improving inclusion of underrepresented groups, or have been effective in this regard. There were very few signs of the social dimension being seen as a priority area in most Bologna Process countries, but from countries that have a good representation of all social groups in higher education we learned that successful social dimension policies need long, sustained effort.

Key challenges for the next years

Attention in the second decade of the Bologna Process needs to turn to the achievement of the substantive, strategic goals more than to further refinement of the architecture. Greater involvement of staff within higher education institutions and other non-state actors may be a key factor for successfully embedding many Bologna action areas in the practice of education. The capstone of the architecture and the bridge to focusing on the compatibility of the outcomes of education are national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Their implementation in higher education institutions should make the common goals of the EHEA clearer to teachers and learners, showing a positive gain for teaching and learning. The NQFs are now on the critical path of the implementation of the EHEA and their completion by 2012 is necessary to make the EHEA a positive reality by 2020.

We have noticed a tendency to place highly relevant but broad and complex issues on the Bologna Process agenda, in particular the social dimension. Addressing such broad questions requires a patient and realistic approach to implementation, including concrete action lines.

There are different speeds in the implementation of the Bologna Process action areas across the 46 countries. This has to do with varying national agendas, with when different countries joined the Bologna Process, with differences in the distribution of authority nationally, with different experiences and traditions regarding higher education policy making, as well as with differences in resource levels that especially affect newcomer countries that have limited possibilities to obtain EU support.

A challenge for the Bologna Process is to keep up the political momentum and the interest of political leadership in the reform processes. This is needed to minimise the risk of the process becoming administration without much impact on the reality of higher education.

1 Goals and Methodology

1.1 Aim of the Study

The Independent Assessment of the Bologna Process was commissioned by the European Commission in cooperation with the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) in order to obtain an independent view on the progress of the Bologna Process in terms of:

- Appraising the achievement of the *operational objectives* of the Bologna Declaration and subsequent communiqués, in particular in the areas of curriculum reform, recognition, quality assurance and mobility.
- Evaluating the extent to which the operational objectives have led to the achievement of the *strategic objectives* of the Bologna Declaration, i.e. ‘to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide’.

We studied major aspects of the Bologna Process, focusing on the areas mentioned above as well as, at the request of the study’s Advisory Board (representing the Bologna Follow-Up Group), the social dimension, the dynamics and management of the Process and the global dimension (see Table 1-). The study is *not* an evaluation of the *entire* Bologna Process as not all aspects of the process were identified as focal areas for the study.

Table 1-1 Main elements of the study

| Areas of action | Operational and intermediate goals | Strategic goals |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Degree and curriculum reform (incl. ECTS, DS) Cooperation in Quality assurance | | Compatibility and comparability of higher education systems in the EHEA |
| Qualifications frameworks | Increased mobility | |
| Recognition policies | | |
| Policies for flexibility and widened access Management of the Bologna Process | Equality and equity of participation | Attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education |

1.2 Methodological Approaches and Constraints

The study methodology consisted of the selection of objective, comparable indicators at the higher education system-level across as many of the EHEA countries as was feasible, beyond the policy-related data of the BFUG’s regular *Stocktaking* (Rauhvargers, Deane, & Pauwels, 2009; Stocktaking Working Group 2005-2007, 2007; Working group, 2005), the national reports underlying those studies, etc. in order to get an independent view of the different action areas and what has been achieved within them.¹ The study involved: desk

¹ The original ‘action lines’ have changed over the years so we prefer to refer to them as ‘action areas’.

research into existing studies from sources other than data collected by the Bologna Process participants; additional data collection to assemble statistics and qualitative indicators; twelve case studies (six country-wide; six thematic across three countries each); around 150 interviews for the case studies and on several issues such as the global dimension and the management of the Bologna Process; and finally a nine-person International Expert Panel that contributed an international perspective on the Bologna Process and its achievements. Indicators drawn from *Stocktaking 2009* data, from other studies and from our own data collection were verified by higher education research experts in the 46 countries, who also updated the information to reflect the 2009 situation and supplied much of the missing information on indicators that we had drawn from studies that did not cover all 46 countries. The experts were selected from the higher education research community; the major selection criterion was that they have no leadership role in implementation of the Bologna Process.

The assessment of the management of the Bologna Process at the European level is based mainly on interviews conducted in 2009 with selected national representatives in the Bologna Follow-Up Group and with representatives of consultative members in the follow-up structures. Interviewees were selected who had long experience in Bologna follow-up structures. The assessment tackles process management and dynamics at the European level (mainly the BFUG) and does not assess the management and dynamics of the implementation of the Bologna Process goals and means in different national contexts.

We studied the *effects* or *impacts* of the Bologna Process (strategic goals), as well as looking at the *implementation* process (operational goals) at the level of the Bologna Process as a whole. This is a task fraught with difficulties. First, the strategic goals of the Bologna Process have not been quantified. Quantified goals are much easier to measure than broad goal formulations. However, not quantifying the strategic goals as well as many intermediate ones was not an omission but a necessity in this intergovernmental process; setting deadlines for implementation of several action lines was already an achievement. The Bologna Process is not a single, fixed policy that can be ‘assessed’ in an ordinary sense, since its goals were often stated as general principles, subject to countries’ interpretations, and goals were added or changed over time as experience and insight increased. Finding, defining and agreeing goals were important parts of the Bologna Process; leaving the interpretation of the goals and the choice of means to the participating countries is an essential characteristic of a voluntary international policy process. Our assessment is based on the current understanding of the main goals of the Bologna Process, taking their dynamism into account as well as the principle that interpretation and implementation is mainly the work of sovereign countries, along with agencies and (autonomous) higher education institutions within those countries. We recognise that the role of European bodies such as the European Commission and of intergovernmental structures including the Bologna Follow-Up Group is primarily one of coordinating and stimulating the activities agreed by the participating, sovereign countries.

The second major challenge to address in the assessment is that other reforms and policies besides the Bologna Process also play a role in achievements, results and impacts. Methodologically, this raises the question of how much of the change over the past decade

in the 48 higher education systems in the 46 EHEA countries ¹ can be attributed to which policy.

The third issue stems from the fact that although the Bologna Process started 10 years ago, many countries joined later, some action lines started later, and some countries needed more time to implement policies for internal reasons: implementation can therefore be expected to be still incomplete. Some policies need considerable time before they create an impact: e.g. in many countries in 2009 very few students have had the experience of completing a new first cycle study programme and entering the labour market or continuing to a second-cycle programme. This implies that some important subjects could not be assessed until now, in particular labour market effects of the new degrees. The extension of the Bologna Process to 2020 was a logical choice to enable the in-depth implementation of its current goals across all of the participating countries.

The final important challenge concerns the availability and comparability of data across all EHEA countries which was poor, especially on the social dimension and on crucial indicators of mobility.

With these caveats in mind, the following sections of this report outline our assessment of the progress made over the past decade across the different aspects of the Bologna Process that we were asked to focus on. To the extent that the focal areas of the different sections permit, we have structured the assessment in each chapter around the following questions:

- Which main goals were formulated in the course of the Bologna Process?
- What was the situation ten years ago, before the Bologna Declaration?
- What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?
- How do we assess the current situation in terms of goal achievement?
- Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful?
- Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be less successful?

Two chapters fall somewhat outside this structure. One concerns the strategic question of how far all of this has moved the EHEA towards its goal of becoming more attractive, which is addressed in chapter 8, where we also look at the global dimension of the Bologna Process. And in chapter 9 we visit six case studies of 'highly achieving' countries to try to identify some conditions for the success in those countries in implementing the action areas we have studied.

¹ Belgium (Dutch and French speaking communities) and the UK (England/Wales/Northern Ireland and Scotland) include two different higher education systems in a number of respects. Therefore, part of our statements will be about 48 higher education *systems*, others about 46 *countries*.

2 Degree and curriculum reforms

This chapter assesses the reforms in two central and closely linked areas of the Bologna Process: degree structures and the curriculum. Several other areas of the Bologna Process have been tied to degree and curriculum reforms: new quality assurance systems have been introduced alongside the reformed degrees, mobility has been increased, and it was hoped that these reforms would also support widening and broadening access to higher education (see Witte 2006). Those issues will be addressed in later chapters, but we shall first look at the central action area of degree and curriculum reform.

2.1 Reforms of degree structures

The key formulation in relation to degree structures is found in the Bologna Declaration (1999): member states would adopt ‘a system essentially based on **two main cycles**, undergraduate and graduate’; ‘access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies’; the first cycle should last ‘a minimum of three years’; ‘the degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification’; and ‘the second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.’ In Berlin (2003), doctoral studies were included as the third cycle in the reforms.

In Bergen (2005), with the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA; see also chapter 4), degree lengths were specified in terms of credits in the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) to ‘typically include 180 to 240’ credits for the first and ‘typically 90 to 120’ credits ‘with a minimum of 60 credits’ for the second degree. No further standardisation of these aspects of degrees was aimed at. Degree titles were not specified either, although the term ‘master’ does appear in the Bologna Declaration (but not ‘bachelor’).

The Bologna Declaration further called for ‘the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees’. The term ‘comparable’ has two possible meanings: (1) possible/easy to compare, and (2) similar; and the combination with ‘readable’ as well as the reference to the Diploma Supplement later in the sentence suggest that the former is intended—the aim was that it should be possible to compare degrees, but similarity was not explicitly formulated as an aim. Comparability is traded off against the value of diversity (Witte, 2008), and the balance between the two in the case of degrees was defined in the QF-EHEA as a bandwidth of credits volumes.

Short-cycle degrees were endorsed in the QF-EHEA as an option, but common standards were not formulated: the degree structure would be ‘comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications)’.

This section presents and analyses the reforms achieved in the area of degree structures in the context of the Bologna Process, based mainly on data from Eurydice (2007, 2009) and to some extent on the national reports for the Bologna Process 2007-2009 the latter of which were checked, complemented and updated by national experts, which considerably changed the picture in many cases. In addition, other published research on degree structures was consulted.

2.1.1 Pre-Bologna Degree Structures

Before the Bologna Process, degree structures were a completely national matter, the spectrum of national models and their internal logics was immense, and convergence across Europe was not a goal of national policies. While 30 of the Bologna participating systems report that they had some form of two-cycle, or rather tiered, structure in place before the Bologna Process (table 2-1), the logic of these systems was often different from what was later perceived as ‘Bologna principles’, for a variety of reasons, e.g. because of longer first cycles or because they lacked possibilities for transition between cycles or institutional types. Accordingly, many tiered systems were adapted in the context of the Bologna Process (e.g. France, Norway, Portugal, Serbia) or their patterns of student enrolment were changed (e.g. Spain).

Table 2-1 Two-cycle type degree structures before start of the Bologna Process (1999)

| Degree structure | Countries | Number of countries |
|--|--|----------------------------|
| Two-cycle type degree structure existing before 1999 | Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic ¹ , Denmark, France, Georgia, Greece, Holy See, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal ² , Russia ³ , Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain ⁴ , Turkey, UK-EWNI, UK-Scotland, Ukraine. | 30 |
| Two-cycle type degree structure not existing before 1999 | Andorra, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium-FI, Belgium-Fr, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, ‘the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’. | 18 |

Notes: ¹ Czech Republic: Two-cycle structure existed in parallel with the traditional long one-cycle programmes but was not mainstreamed before Bologna. ² Portugal: two-cycle structure existed in the polytechnic sector. ³ Russia: two-cycle structure was introduced in 1992 alongside the long cycles, implementation was and is voluntary. ⁴ Spain: two-cycle structure existed, but about half the students followed integrated programmes.

Source: National Reports for the Bologna Process 2007-2009, checked by national experts.

2.1.2 Most Commonly Adopted Models for the First Two Cycles

A single model for Bologna-type degree structures, such as the so-called 3+2 model, was never formulated in any official Bologna Process document, a spectrum of credits volumes being given for each cycle in the QF-EHEA. Since no single prescribed model exists, a question that arises concerns the degree lengths that were chosen by the member states.

All higher education systems in the EHEA today display some form of two-cycle structure. According to our data (see table 2-2), 20 higher education systems reported that they allow various combinations and did not indicate a single most commonly adopted one in practice. The single model most commonly adopted in practice in 19 higher education systems is a first degree of 180 credits and a second degree of 120 credits (180+120 credits, or 3+2 years of full-time study). However, in these systems other combinations are often legally possible. Five countries mainly use 240+120 credits, totalling six years of full-time study up to the Master’s level, and two more systems have unique dominant models, respectively 180+90 credits and 240+60 credits.

Table 2-2 Two-cycle structure models most commonly adopted per higher education system

| Models | Countries | Number of countries |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 180+120 = 300 credits | Andorra, Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic ¹ , Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany ¹ , Hungary, Holy See, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Norway, Poland ¹ , Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia ¹ . | 19 |
| Various combinations | Albania, Belgium-FI, Belgium-Fr, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', UK-E/W/NL. | 20 |
| 240+120 = 360 credits | Armenia, Georgia, Lithuania, Russia, Turkey. | 5 |
| 240+60 = 300 credits | Bulgaria | 1 |
| 240+90 = 330 credits | UK-Scotland | 1 |

Note: Data missing for Azerbaijan and Ukraine. ¹Legally, various combinations are possible in these systems. ²Slovenia: information reflects situation in 2009/10.

Source: Eurydice (2009) checked by national experts.

In all systems, first degrees fall in the credit range of 180-240 credits and, with the exception of some Master's degrees in the Czech Republic, all second degrees fall in the range of 60-120 credits. What does not become visible from these tables is that there are systems like the Netherlands and the UK-England/Northern Ireland/Wales, where a total of four years of full-time study to the Master's level (180+60/90 credits) is common. To the extent that recognition practice is still based on length of full-time study rather than competences, these differences constitute an important issue (see chapter 5).

Taking into account the diversity within national legal frameworks, the spectrum of possible models is much wider than the table suggests. Also, if we did not count by country, but numbers of study programmes or student numbers per course, another picture would emerge: larger higher education systems with more programmes and more students would gain more weight. For instance, the 240+120 credits model would then look much more prominent because it is applied in around 1,000 Russian higher education institutions. Moreover, programmes of lengths which are not dominant in a particular country but do exist (e.g. 240+60 credits in a country where 180+120 credits is the normal model), would become visible. And if student numbers were counted, we might show that the vast majority of students are in programmes for humanities, while different degree structure models for, e.g., natural sciences, would appear much less prominent because there are few students in them.

2.1.3 Students Enrolled in Two-Cycle Degree Structures

In 30 higher education systems, 90% or more of students are in two cycle degree structures (Table 2-3). Percentages lower than 100 either reflect ongoing transition to the new structure or the fact that certain study fields are exempted from the two-cycle model

(see next section). In six systems, less than half of the students are enrolled in the two-cycle structure, among them two large ones (Germany and the Russian Federation).

Table 2-3 Percentage of students enrolled in two-cycle degree structures

| % | Countries | Number of countries |
|--------|--|---------------------|
| 100% | Armenia, Belgium-Fr, Cyprus, Holy See, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Portugal ¹ , Romania, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine | 12 |
| 90-99% | Albania (96%), Belgium-NL (99%), Bulgaria (98%), Denmark (96%), Estonia (94%), Finland (98%), Georgia (93%), Greece (90%), Italy (99%), Latvia (90%), Lithuania (95%), Montenegro (95%), Norway (97%), The Netherlands (99%), Serbia (>90%) ¹ , Turkey (97%), UK-Scotland (96%), UK-E/W/Ni (95%). | 18 |
| 50-89% | Azerbaijan (78%), Bosnia and Herzegovina ² , Croatia (76%), Czech Republic (80%), France (85%), Hungary (58%), Luxembourg (83%), Moldova (91%), Poland (89%), Slovakia (88%), Switzerland (85%) | 11 |
| 25-49% | Andorra (30%), Austria (41%), Germany (43%) ³ , Slovenia (36%) ⁴ , 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' (30%) | 5 |
| <25% | Russia (9%) | 1 |

Notes: Inconsistencies of percentages with table 2-4 can be due to definitional issues (e.g. some countries regard formal coverage by a legal framework that foresees exceptions such as integrated long degrees leading directly to Master's levels as part of the two-cycle degree structures, others do not).

Data on Azerbaijan: missing. ¹ Serbia and Portugal: data from 2009/10. ² Bosnia and Herzegovina: data from 2008/09. ³ Germany: data from 2008/09. ⁴ Slovenia: from 2009/10 onwards, enrolment in old-type study programmes is no longer possible.

Source: National Reports for the Bologna Process 2007-2009, checked by national experts.

2.1.4 Exceptions to two-cycle degree structures

The need or possibility for exceptions to the two-cycle degree system may not have been thought of at first, but the issue emerged during Bologna Process seminars. In the Bologna Process Conference on Master-level Degrees in Helsinki (2003), regulated professions were mentioned as possible exceptions to the two-cycle structures, although it was also mentioned that intermediate degrees in those fields (i.e. a Bachelor's degree) could nevertheless be useful for reasons other than access to the controlled professions.

Empirically, in 37 participating systems, some fields of study are exempted from the national two-cycle systems; in 11 systems the two-cycle model is applied across the board. Only Armenia, the French Community of Belgium, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, and Sweden have every student studying in the two-cycle structures with no field exempted—in other words, what we might call full and across the board implementation of the two-cycle model. For systems where no study field is excluded, but there is less than 100% enrolment in two-cycle structures, the transition process is probably still ongoing (this holds for Andorra, Azerbaijan, the Flemish community of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland). Countries that report 100% enrolment in the two-cycle structures whilst listing excluded fields probably formally define these fields as part of the reformed ('two-cycle') structure (Holy See, Ireland, Malta, Romania, Spain, and Ukraine).

Table 2-4 Fields excluded from the two-cycle structure, by higher education system

| Study field | Countries | Number of countries |
|--------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Medicine | Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', UK-E/W/Ni, UK-Scotland, Ukraine | 31 |
| Dentistry | Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', Turkey, UK- E/W/Ni, UK-Scotland, Ukraine | 29 |
| Veterinary studies | Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', Turkey, UK-E/W/Ni, UK-Scotland, Ukraine | 24 |
| Pharmacy | Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. | 20 |
| Architecture | Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Moldova, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain | 10 |
| Law | Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland | 5 |
| Engineering | Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Slovakia (some programmes) | 5 |
| Theology | Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Holy See | 5 |
| Teacher education | Croatia, Czech Republic (for primary and partly secondary school teachers), Estonia, Germany (in transition in some <i>Länder</i>), Luxembourg (for secondary school teachers) | 5 |
| Arts | Croatia, Greece, Hungary (crafts, design, performing arts, film), Poland (acting) | 4 |
| Psychology | Poland, Norway | 2 |
| Accountancy | Malta | 1 |
| Agriculture | Greece | 1 |
| Fish sciences | Norway | 1 |
| Pedagogics | Italy | 1 |

Note: ¹ Portugal: in integrated Master's programmes, a first-cycle degree may be awarded upon request.
Source: Eurydice (2007) checked by national experts.

Table 2-4 shows that the exceptions are concentrated in the medical field with medicine (31), dentistry (29), veterinary studies (24), and pharmacy (20) following different models in large numbers of systems. But architecture (10), law (5), engineering (5), theology (5), arts (4) and teacher education (4) are also organised differently in several countries.

It seems fair to assume that the widespread exceptions, such as in the medical field, are based on disciplinary arguments and traditions while for the fields that are only exempted in a few countries, national arguments are prevalent. In some systems, the exemptions

are also related to the nature of the examination system (e.g. professional or state examinations) or to a sectoral logic (e.g. *grandes écoles* in France). However, the fact that study fields have issues with the two-cycle structure does not mean that they do not engage actively in other aspects of the Bologna Process (Huisman, Witte, & File, 2006). Also, discussions and developments are still in flux; in this context, it is interesting that while medicine is excluded from the common form of two-cycle structures in the UK and Ireland, where these structures have a long tradition, Switzerland and the Netherlands have developed forms of two-cycle study programmes in medicine (see Probst, de Weert and Witte, 2008).

2.1.5 Doctoral studies

For doctoral studies, major aims and principles were outlined (Bologna Seminar on “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society”, 2005) but ministers did not specify a desired length or credits volume, reflecting both the intention to maintain diversity of provision and the conviction that it would be inadequate to express doctoral education in terms of credits. And indeed, a diversity of models continues to be found, with three years nominal duration up to the award of the doctoral degree being most frequently mentioned (16 countries).

Table 2-5 Duration of the third degree (doctoral studies)

| Number of years | Countries | Number of countries |
|-----------------|---|---------------------|
| 3 years | Austria, Belgium-FI, Belgium-Fr, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Romania, Slovenia ¹ | 16 |
| 3-4 years | Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, UK-E/W/NI, UK-Scotland | 9 |
| 4 years | Armenia, Estonia, ² Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey | 6 |
| 3-5 years | Albania, Germany, Iceland, Malta, Serbia, Switzerland | 6 |
| Other | Cyprus (3-8 years), Holy See (2-4 years), Lithuania (2-6 years), Russia (3+3 years), Spain (4-5 years), ‘the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ (min. 2 years). | 6 |

Notes: Liechtenstein, Andorra, and Luxembourg: not applicable. Azerbaijan and Ukraine: data not available. ¹ Slovenia: data refers to 2009/10. ² Legal framework allows for 3-4 years.

Source: Own compilation based on Eurydice (2007), checked by national experts. Eurydice data reflect nominal duration; for some countries the dominant length in practice is listed based on the national expert’s input.

2.1.6 Short-cycle studies

Short-cycle studies have a special status in the Bologna Process, being referred to in the QF-EHEA as something that may have its place within national contexts, without formulating European ranges or standards for them. As can be seen in Table 2-6, short-cycle degrees exist in the majority of systems participating in the Bologna Process (26) and cater for substantial student numbers in some of them (15% of students or more in eight, 5% of students or more in 12 higher education systems).

Table 2-6 Prevalence of short-cycle programmes in higher education, by higher education system

| Position of short-cycle programmes | Countries (with % of students in these programmes) | Number of countries |
|--|--|----------------------------|
| Short-cycle programmes exist in the country | Albania (2%), Andorra (19%), Belgium—Fl, Belgium—Fr, Croatia (2%), Cyprus (26%), Denmark (9%), France (16% ¹), Georgia (6%), Holy See (n.a.), Hungary (4%), Iceland (n.a.), Ireland (5%), Italy, Latvia (17%), Luxembourg (22%), Malta (0%), the Netherlands (<2%) ² , Norway (n.a.), Portugal (2%) ³ , Spain (15%), Sweden (2%), Turkey (30%) ³ , UK-E/W/Nl (3%), Ukraine (5%), UK-Scotland (26%). | 26 |
| Short-cycle programmes do not exist in the country | Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. | 22 |

Notes: ¹ France: data from 2006. ² Netherlands: introduced recently. ³ Portugal and Turkey: data from 2008/09.

Source: Eurydice (2007) checked by national experts.

2.2 Curriculum reforms

In the Bologna Declaration (1999), the 'establishment of a credit system such as the ECTS' was agreed upon 'as a means of promoting student mobility'. In Prague (2001), the aims of achieving 'greater flexibility and transferability' through a credit system were added, and in Berlin, the move to ECTS was agreed upon also as a means of 'of international curriculum development (2003)'. The establishment of the ECTS is meant to promote 'greater flexibility' for students and easier 'transferability' of their achievements—both nationally and internationally—as agreed in Prague (2001). This implies modularisation understood as breaking programmes down into smaller units. A fair proportion of elective courses in the curriculum also support these aims. Modularisation and a reasonable share of electives can also help to create 'opportunities for flexible learning paths' as agreed in the Berlin communiqué (2005); and support the aims of 'student-centred learning', of 'flexible and more individually tailored learning paths', and of 'improving the teaching quality of study programmes at all levels' as endorsed in the Leuven communiqué (2009). This chapter therefore also looks at modularisation and electives as elements of curriculum reforms in the Bologna context.

In the London communiqué (2007), it was stressed that 'proper implementation of ECTS' is 'based on learning outcomes and student workload'. The use of learning outcomes and workload is also needed for proper implementation of national qualifications frameworks as agreed in the Berlin communiqué (2003) (see also the QF-EHEA 2005). The implementation of the Diploma Supplement is discussed in chapter 5.

Prior to the Bologna Process, ECTS was used as a transfer instrument in the context of international student exchange only to a very limited extent, mainly within the Erasmus programme, and not more broadly as an instrument to make curricula more student-centred and flexible. The idea that higher education curricula should be modularised was not shared across Europe. There was no European-wide discussion on curricular reforms, the general direction such reforms should take, or of student-centredness and flexibility as

guiding principles for these reforms, although moves in this direction were undertaken in some countries more than in others (beginning in the UK).

2.2.1 ECTS

This section looks at the use of ECTS as a national credit system in the EHEA, at its use within institutions and programmes, and at the practices used for allocating European Credits (credits).

2.2.1.1 Use of ECTS within national credit systems

Regarding the application of the ECTS in general, nearly all systems (43) use ECTS or are in transition towards it (Spain and Turkey); the few exceptions all use ECTS-compatible systems (Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden, and the UK-E/W/Ni and Scotland). The British credit systems are in many respects further developed than ECTS, as they include level indicators and concrete agreements on mutual recognition.

2.2.1.2 Diffusion of ECTS within national higher education systems

The diffusion of ECTS or ECTS-compatible credit systems within Bologna member states proceeds fairly well overall. The majority of participating systems (28) apply ECTS (or a compatible system) across the board. Fourteen more systems use it in 75 or more percent of (non-doctoral) programmes and are thus in an advanced state of implementation (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria (ca. 75%), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France (ca. 80%), Germany (76%), the Holy See, Latvia (over 90%), Malta, Serbia, Spain (ca. 80%), ‘the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’. Six systems—mostly concentrated in the East and in the South-East of Europe—display lower percentages: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Slovenia, Turkey, Greece (under 10%) and Russia (9%). In most of these countries, the use of ECTS is obligatory for Bologna-type degrees, so the percentages can be interpreted as corresponding to the state of transition to Bologna-type degrees and/or the progress with their accreditation.¹

2.2.2 Basis for allocation of European Credits

According to the European Commission’s ECTS Users’ Guide, ‘ECTS is a student-centred system based on the *student workload* required to achieve the objectives of the programme of study. These objectives should preferably be specified in terms of *learning outcomes and competences* to be acquired’ (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2004). However, institutions in only twelve countries generally fulfil this requirement according to our data (Table 2-7). Twenty two systems use only learning outcomes or only the workload concept, and thirteen more countries use neither.²

¹ This section is based on the national reports for the Bologna Process 2007-2009, checked by national experts. Percentages, where available, are in many cases based on national experts’ estimates, and refer to 2009. Where reforms are ongoing, the estimates represent a snapshot. In Armenia, the use of credits is foreseen across the board from 2010/11 onwards.

² These data represent self-assessments that are delicate to make, because they are generally not based on empirical surveys, and because where a country can be placed is largely a matter of interpretation.

2.2.3 Modular structures

Modularisation is a key element of curriculum reforms in the context of the Bologna Process as it serves as an enabler for student mobility and student choice—if properly implemented, i.e. if module sizes are not too large, modules are not spread over more than a maximum of two terms or semesters, and if there is enough flexibility for students in choosing modules.

Table 2-7 Dominant practice in the allocation of credits

| <i>Dominant practice</i> | <i>Higher education systems</i> | <i>Number of countries</i> |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| 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. | 12 |
| 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 ¹ , Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, Slovenia ² . | 18 |
| 3. Credits allocated to courses based on defined and written learning outcomes, but without estimation of average student workload. | Croatia ² , The Netherlands, Romania, UK-E/W/NL. | 4 |
| 4. Credits allocated to courses based on teaching / contact hours. | Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina ³ , Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Serbia ⁴ , Slovakia, Spain ⁴ , Turkey, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. | 11 |
| 5. Credits formally allocated to individual courses without any specific rationale. | Georgia, Ukraine. | 2 |

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, checked by national experts.

One might assume that all countries that apply ECTS have their degree programmes modularised, as European credits have to be assigned to individual modules. However this is not the case. Only in 11 of the higher education systems participating in the Bologna Process are 90% or more of the degree programmes modularised. Most countries are still in the initiation stage (15) or in the middle of implementation (11). Seven countries report that programmes are not modularised at all.

These data again need to be interpreted with caution, as it is based on weak evidence (surveys with little coverage or expert estimates), as transition is ongoing, and as the range of national (and local) interpretations of the term 'modularisation' is immense. Some see it as 'breaking programmes into parts', some as 'building larger and coherent

blocks’ or ‘introducing tracks’, some as ‘introducing continuous assessment’. Implementation patterns and module sizes vary accordingly.

Table 2-8 Proportions of study programmes with modular structures

| Study programme with modular structures | Countries | Number of countries |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| 1. None | Azerbaijan, Croatia, Holy See, Lithuania, Montenegro, Slovakia, Turkey. | 7 |
| 2. There has been an initiation, but no general structure or clear implementation | Albania, Andorra, Belgium-FI, Belgium-Fr, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, ‘the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’, Ukraine. | 14 |
| 3. 25%-90% are modularised (implementation ongoing) | Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, UK-EWNI. | 13 |
| 4. More than 90% are modularised | Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, UK-Scotland. | 13 |

Note: Information on Greece is missing.

Source: National Reports for the Bologna Process 2007-2009, Huisman et al (2006), checked by national experts.

2.2.4 Percentage of electives

As for the proportion of elective course elements in a typical degree programme, most countries are in the middle range. There are a few countries with typically more than 50% electives (Denmark, Finland, Georgia, UK-E/W/Ni and Scotland), and there are a few countries in which programmes are typically completely determined (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta). Most systems are in between, with programmes typically offering about 25-50% of electives (Austria, Belgium-French Community, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Spain, ‘the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’) or less than about 25% of electives (Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Belgium-FI, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine).

Again, the data needs to be interpreted with caution, because it is again based on surveys with low coverage or expert estimates; and because it would be desirable to distinguish ‘complete electives’ from ‘bounded electives’ and other structuring models that may or not be called ‘elective’ (e.g. major-minor models).

Finally, while it seems reasonable to assume that a high percentage of electives eases recognition and therefore horizontal mobility, this would need to be checked in practice.¹

¹ The data for this section are based on Huisman et al. (2006), checked by national experts. Data not available for Azerbaijan, Holy See, Russia, Serbia, and Switzerland. In Serbia, accreditation requires

2.3 The assessment of degree and curriculum. reform

Stated goals

Degree reform

- Adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, with the first cycle lasting a minimum of 3 years (1999); later extended to three cycles (2003);
 - Credits for the first degree should range between 180 and 240 credits in the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS), for the second degree between 90 and 120 credits, with a minimum of 60 credits (QF-EHEA 2005);
 - No goal was formulated regarding student enrolment in the two-cycle structures, but by aiming at implementation by 2010 (1999), transition of the large majority of learners to these structures was an implicit aim.
- On short cycle programmes, no goal was stated; the possibility to introduce or maintain them was left to countries (2005).
- Doctoral education: need for structured doctoral programmes, normal workload of 3-4 years, no overregulation of doctoral education (2005); developing and maintaining a wide variety of doctoral education.
- Within each cycle, opportunities for mobility shall be created in the structure of degree programmes (2009).

Curriculum reform

- The establishment of a credit system such as the ECTS as a means of promoting student mobility (1999), of greater flexibility and transferability (2001) and of international curriculum development (2003);
 - Establishment of the ECTS is meant to promote greater flexibility and transferability (2001); this implies tri-/semesterisation, modularisation of study programmes and a fair proportion of elective courses. (This point is further connected to our chapter on widening participation.)
 - Proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload (2007); in connection with national qualifications frameworks (2003; QF-EHEA 2005);

What was the situation ten years ago, before the Bologna Process?

Degree reform

- Degree structures were a completely national matter, the spectrum of national models and their internal logics was immense. While more than half of the national systems

20% electives in first-cycle and 30% in second-cycle degree programmes (in ECTS). In Slovenia, accredited degree programmes must have at least 10% electives. In Sweden, electives comprise around 50% of programmes.

(30) had a type of two-cycle structure pre-Bologna, these were not necessarily 'Bologna-type' structures.

- Systems with long first-cycle degrees often had their first degrees located at Master's-level, while systems with two cycles tended to view even long first degrees from abroad as being at Bachelor's level. This was particularly an issue between European and US higher education.
- For learners from outside Europe, it was difficult to enter into European higher education directly at graduate level in systems without two cycles. This was often only possible on the basis of individual arrangements for credit recognition.

Curriculum reform

- ECTS was used as a transfer instrument in the context of international student exchange only to a very limited extent, mainly within the Erasmus programme, and not more broadly as an instrument to make curricula more learner-centred and flexible. The idea that higher education curricula should be modularised was not shared across Europe.
- Discussions on curricular reforms, the general direction such reforms should take, and learner-centredness and flexibility as guiding principles for such reforms had advanced in only a few countries (e.g. in the UK).

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

Degree reform

- All higher education systems in the EHEA today display some form of two-cycle structure. Also many pre-Bologna two-cycle structures have been adapted in the context of the Bologna Process. Twenty systems reported that they allow various combinations. The single model most commonly adopted in practice in 19 higher education systems is a first degree of 180 credits and a second degree of 120 credits (180+120 credits, or 3+2 years of full-time study). However, in these systems several combinations are often legally possible. Only a small minority of countries have opted for other main models: 240+120 credits (5 systems), 240+60 credits (1 system), or 180+90 credits (1 system).
- In 37 European higher education systems, certain fields of study are exempted from the Bologna-type two-cycle structure. The subjects most commonly exempted include medicine (31), dentistry (29), veterinary studies (24) and pharmacy (20 systems).
- In 30 systems, 90–100% of learners study in 'Bologna-type' structures. In six Bologna member states less than 50% of the learners are studying in reformed degree programmes, among them two large systems—Germany and Russia.
- Doctoral programmes have been subject of attention since 2003. Variety in doctoral studies continues to exist, as intended by ministers.
- Short-cycle degrees are present in 26 higher education systems. The role and (quantitative) importance of this qualification level varies, but is substantial in a good handful of European higher education systems (esp. Cyprus, France, Latvia, Luxembourg, Spain, Turkey and UK-Scotland).

Curriculum reform

- Nearly all systems (43) use ECTS or are in transition towards it (Spain and Turkey); the few exceptions all use ECTS-compatible systems (Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and the UK-E/W/Ni and Scotland).
- There is today a common European discourse on curriculum reform, in which concepts such as student workload and learning outcomes (see also the section on the qualifications frameworks, below) play a key role. The aim of moving from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach to curriculum design is widely shared among the countries.

Overall assessment

Degree reform

- All countries have implemented a two-cycle system with the first cycle lasting a minimum of three years. This goal has been fully achieved.
- All countries adopted a credit range of 180-240 credits for the first and 60-120 credits for the second degree. This goal has been fully achieved.
 - As no explicit standard was formulated for the cumulative number of credits needed for the award of the second degree, the existing variety (from mostly 240 to 360 credits) does not diminish goal achievement.
- The percentage of learners studying in the first two cycles is below 50% in six systems. This needs attention. Whether this reflects ongoing transition (especially in the four countries that joined the Bologna Process recently) or deeper problems with the two-cycle structure in these countries should be evaluated.
- Certain knowledge areas (above all in the medical field) are exempted from the reforms in a substantial number of countries but included in others. This may call for a clarification of the possibilities and goals of (two-/three cycle) programmes in these fields.
- Short programmes of different types have been included in 26 higher education systems in different cycles; in eight higher education systems they cater for more than 15% of learners.
- Doctoral degrees have become more structured than before the Bologna Declaration in many countries; a diversity of models continues to exist as agreed, and a nominal length of 3-4 years is the most common duration.

Curriculum reform

- All higher education systems use ECTS, are in transition towards it, or use ECTS-compatible systems (see above). This goal has been substantially achieved at the level of regulation.
 - The degree of use of ECTS in institutions and programmes needs attention. The majority of participating systems (28) apply ECTS (or a compatible system) across the board, but six systems use it in less than 75% of non-doctoral programmes.

- Only 12 systems use both student workload and learning outcomes as the basis for the allocation of credits. Proper and system-wide use of ECTS needs further attention.
- In only 13 systems 90% or more of study programmes have been modularised and there is no common understanding across all EHEA countries of the concept of ‘modularisation’ as a tool to foster increased mobility, flexibility and transferability. This goal has only been partly achieved and needs attention.
- While no explicit goal regarding the proportion of elective courses in a typical degree programme was formulated, the fact that 21 systems typically have less than 25% of electives in a degree programme requires attention in light of the aims of greater learner-centeredness and flexible, more individually tailored learning paths.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful?

Degree reform

- Many European countries significantly adjusted their degree structures in the context of the Bologna Process. There was a widespread readiness to accept the need for more compatibility in the diversity of European higher education systems at the turn of the century.
- Without any standard-setting in this area, ‘180+120 credits’ (or in years of full-time study: ‘3+2’) emerged as the prominent model in Europe, while allowing for enough flexibility to accommodate other needs through variations of this model.
- The Bologna Process was flexible enough to accommodate the short-cycle degrees that were maintained or introduced in many countries’ higher education systems.

Curriculum reform

- From the same motivation for compatibility that led countries to accept degree reform, ECTS (or compatible systems) and modularisation were almost universally accepted as the preferred way to organise course units within the curriculum—with sometimes profound changes to curricula that affect all learners. However, beyond approval in principle, their implementation is not yet complete.
- The Bologna Process has made Europe a major area in the world for generating ideas and instruments for curriculum reform to tackle the needs of today’s knowledge societies. Other regions are very interested to learn from the EHEA in this respect.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be less successful?

Degree reform

- No standard for the length of first and second degrees has been formulated at a European level: credit ranges were agreed (180–240 credits + (60)90–120 credits in general) and connected to learning outcomes (qualifications frameworks). Whether the absence of a uniform credit size per cycle is seen as a deficiency, strength or just a fact depends on one’s interpretation of the goals of ‘comparability’ and ‘compatibility’. It also depends on the degree of tolerance for differences before they are called

‘substantial’, and on the application of competence-orientation (learning outcomes) in the recognition practices of degrees throughout the EHEA.

- In many countries, Bologna-type two-cycle structures were not seen as suitable for certain subjects, predominantly in the medical field. Some countries have implemented Bologna-type models even in this area (e.g. the Netherlands, Switzerland), while systems with a long tradition of two-cycle structures (e.g. Ireland, the UK) have not included medicine and other subjects among their two-cycle programmes. Further systematic European-wide discourse on this issue might be useful, especially on goals and options for first-cycle graduates.

Curriculum reform

- Many systems still struggle with two ‘text-book concepts’ in the implementation of ECTS: ‘student workload’ and ‘learning outcomes’. Only in 12 systems is ECTS being applied on the basis of both concepts. Using both requires significant paradigm shifts amongst academics and not merely technical adaptations.
- In six systems that have accepted ECTS as the national credit system, it is used in less than 75% of study programmes. In this area implementation is still ongoing.
- Where modularisation and ECTS have been implemented, it is not yet clear whether they have contributed to facilitating student mobility and flexibility in individual study paths. In some countries, such as Austria and Germany, recent student protests have occurred partly because learners hold that the contrary is the case.

3 Quality assurance

3.1 Dynamics of the action area

Quality assurance has ‘proven to be at the heart’ of the Bologna Process (Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2003), having begun as only a vague statement almost at the end of the Bologna Declaration where it called for: ‘Promotion of **European co-operation in quality assurance** with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies’ (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 1999). The need for countries to develop or update quality assurance systems was voiced strongly in the 2003 Berlin communiqué. The ‘criteria and methodologies’ developed into the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG), which were developed by the E4, the cooperation of stakeholders from higher education institutions (EUA and EURASHE) and students (ESU) led by the association of quality assessment agencies, ENQA. The ESG were adopted by the ministers in Bergen in 2005 (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2005; European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2005). One new goal appeared in Bergen: a register of quality assessment agencies was tabled (EQAR), to make transparent which agencies substantially fulfilled the requirements of the ESG. At the next ministerial meeting, London 2007, the register was welcomed (Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2007). It became operative a year later and at the Leuven ministerial meeting an external evaluation of the Register was called for.

From Bergen onwards, the focus of the communiqués mainly was on registering achievements, adding new actions only when necessary to achieve the goals that had been set previously. Thus, the London communiqué highlighted the impact of the ESG and ‘progress’ toward mutual recognition of accreditation and evaluation outcomes. The statement, repeated from earlier communiqués, that the ministers ‘encourage continued international cooperation’ of the quality assessment agencies suggests that much still needed to be done.

The dynamics of this action line are then mainly concerned with the gradual emergence of the ESG, and their expression in ENQA and the EQAR. First we will turn to the overview of the information on the 46 signatory countries.

3.2 Situation before Bologna

Most countries had introduced forms of quality assurance in the 1980s-1990s, in response to national concerns (Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education, 1998; Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004). In Central and Eastern Europe, accreditation had been introduced to support the major transformations of higher education to the needs of a post-communist society (massification, curriculum change, rise of private higher education, etc.). In the rest of Europe, massification and budget restrictions had necessitated new steering mechanisms for higher education, often including internal and external quality assurance but mostly without accreditation. Achieving international standards and international compatibility were considerations mainly in small countries and in the countries going through post-communist transformation.

3.3 Achievements in the countries participating in the Bologna Process

In 47 out of 48 higher education systems, systems with internal and external quality assurance are functioning system-wide. The exception is found in one of the new Bologna Process joiners (Bosnia-Herzegovina ¹). However, in many countries the actual proportion of higher education institutions that have been evaluated once or more often by external quality assessment (25 systems), let alone that have *regular* internal quality assurance (18 systems) are far less than full. Internal and external quality assurance according to ESG standards was functioning in 16 of the 48 higher education systems in 2009.

For many countries, the Bologna Declaration itself had been a reason to adapt quality assurance schemes (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands, Spain), or to introduce one. This action line was seen as an early priority in these cases. Other countries, meanwhile, waited until the Process had given more explicit attention to it (from 2003-2005 onwards). Further adaptations to quality assurance schemes are currently being spurred by the ESG and the QF-EHEA (Qualifications Framework). This second round of changes has just started; it is too early to assess their impacts. As a first indication, our thematic case study of Spain, Sweden and Hungary, showed that quality assurance systems have been changed in recent years.

Up to now changes in Hungary have not been particularly far-reaching: they started on a large scale rather late (only after the 2005 higher education law) and their in-depth implementation is yet to begin, especially the realisation of the implications of a learning-outcomes based curriculum in higher education institutions. It may seem that the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) acted as a buffer, absorbing change impulses and making the higher education institutions move only small steps until now. Maybe, however, this is the fastest pace of change that can be absorbed by the Hungarian higher education institutions and it would not help to push them harder.

Hungary and Sweden show the overriding influence of national debates and histories on their reforms. Especially in Sweden, many reforms discussed in 2009 went beyond expectations from the ESG or other elements of the Bologna Process. There seemed to be little doubt in Sweden about compatibility with other quality assurance systems in the EHEA.

The Spanish case shows how a system made great efforts to adapt to Bologna Process requirements. It also shows the complexities of multi-level governance, because Spain's higher education governance is devolved to the regions, so that the national quality assessment agency, ANECA, has to mediate both ways, between the international (EHEA) level and the regional quality assessment agencies.

Adaptations to quality assurance since the Bologna Declaration have often included the introduction of *accreditation*, in response in particular to the Berlin communiqué. Accreditation in practice implies more emphasis on quality control and accountability, less on quality enhancement (Harvey, 2004; Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007). After

¹ In Bosnia-Herzegovina external quality assurance exists partly, but not across the *whole* territory.

some years into the Bologna Process, contrary moves have become apparent in some countries, where a 'light touch' approach to quality assurance is now wanted after 'heavy-handed' quality control has been in place for some time (e.g. Ireland, UK, mentioned in interviews). The argument to choose programme-level assessment or accreditation initially is logical: credits and degrees awarded by study programmes are what students carry with them to be mobile in the EHEA. However, programme accreditation puts a heavy administrative burden on higher education systems. Some systems are introducing more efficiently designed quality assurance schemes, such as system accreditation or institutional accreditation (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands). At the same time, the institutional focus of such approaches highlights the institutional responsibility for organising and teaching the study programmes.

With regard to the issue of participation in designing quality assurance systems, the Bologna Process has had a stronger focus on some types of stakeholders than others, i.e. on higher education institutions and students, than on academic staff and external stakeholders (e.g. employers and professions). For instance, whilst Education International (representing labour unions) and Business Europe (representing industrial federations) are part of the Bologna Process, they were not part of the development of quality assurance, which was done among the E4. More recently, however, these organisations did become members of a major result of the E4 co-operation, the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR, see below).

Although a range of stakeholders is involved in the operation of quality assessment, the involvement of internal stakeholders is important to balance the Bologna Process's emphasis on the governmental-level regulation of quality assessment. Engagement of stakeholders within higher education institutions is needed to create the genuine quality cultures that are intended, rather than simply cultures of compliance. A number of alternatives to the top-down approach exist: for instance, some countries have a tradition of external examiners and visitors which means that the 'shop-floor' level is reached more directly, e.g. Denmark, Malta, Norway and the UK.

With regard to student participation in quality assurance systems, only two countries scored the lowest grade in the latest *Stocktaking* report, whilst 19 reached the highest grade (Rauhvargers, et al., 2009, p. 60). However, as one commentator noted, the presence of students does not always mean equality with respect to other participants: 'The role of the students is formal presence with no real influence over decisions' (national contact person, South-Eastern Europe). This remark reinforces the *Stocktaking* observation that in about one third of countries students are only observers in external review teams.

In relation to internationalisation of quality assurance, quality assurance schemes now often include international participation in review teams. Indeed, involving international members in external evaluation teams is the most common manner of internationalising quality assurance (Rauhvargers, et al., 2009, p. 64): in 20 higher education systems international team members are standard and the practice is absent in only England/Wales/Northern Ireland and six late joiners to the Bologna Process.

With respect to whether countries organise their own national quality assessment agencies, size appears to be a factor: some states (e.g. Liechtenstein, Malta) consider themselves too small to have one. But size is a relative argument: Flanders cooperates with the Netherlands in the bi-national agency NVAO, although it is larger than some other higher education systems that do have their own quality assessment agencies. The

EQAR however can be of assistance in this respect: for instance, Liechtenstein's higher education institutions are requested to refer to agencies on the EQAR register for their quality assurance.

3.3.1 *Critical success factors at the state level*

Almost universally quality assessment schemes have now been introduced that fulfil the (pre-ESG) expectations of the Bologna Process. As such, it is no longer necessary to search for critical success factors at this level. Given this, an important question now arising concerns the critical success factors that lie behind the successful adaptation of external (and internal) quality assessment schemes to the ESG. The rapidly growing number of EQAR-registered quality assessment agencies suggests that fast movement towards substantial compliance is prevalent. However, substantial compliance with the ESG may be achieved in many different ways. The examples of Hungary and Sweden highlight the importance of national policy agendas in the actual design of quality assessment schemes within the broad range of possibilities allowed by the ESG. Accordingly, an important success factor appears to be to ensure that *the national agenda is in line with the Bologna agenda* to further the cause of the Bologna Process. Note that 'in line' is meant here in a broad sense: the Bologna Process should be seen as a boundary condition defining a (large, as Sweden shows) policy design space in which the policy may move. Furthermore, a broad interpretation helps to support another success factor, namely the *commitment of national policy-makers* which is essential since they may need to carry the higher education reform agenda in the face of possible opposition. This, in turn, supports a third factor, i.e. an *understanding among the interested audience* (the higher education and political communities) which is important in reducing resistance due to misunderstandings.

3.4 **Achievements at the EHEA level in cooperation regarding quality assurance**

The major element of EHEA-wide achievements with regard to quality assurance has undoubtedly been the establishment of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2005). The ESG grew out of the desire to develop comparable criteria and methodologies for quality assurance across the whole EHEA area, while maintaining room for diversity for the signatory countries. They were developed in cooperation between the E4, representing the quality assessment agencies (in ENQA), the universities (in EUA) and other higher education institutions (in EURASHE) as well as students (in ESIB, later ESU). The multidimensional balancing act that these parties achieved between their 'home fronts' and the different countries resulted in standards and guidelines of a process-oriented character rather than prescribing, for instance, quality assurance models or levels of quality work achievement.

Developing 'comparable criteria' was always likely to be potentially controversial, given the previous emphasis on diversity as Europe's *forte* in higher education. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the ESG reflect the diversity issue strongly—to the extent that, in fact, there are no criteria that directly affect actual education. It has to be borne in mind, though, that a number of boundary conditions for the curricula had already been set. The Sorbonne and Bologna statements about the lengths of degree programmes had

been further defined in several seminars (normally 180-240 credits for the first cycle, 90-120 credits for the second, etc.).

3.4.1 *ESG in internal and external quality assurance*

Given this context, the norms implied in the ESG, Part 1, are that higher education institutions must have quality assurance on all major elements of the educational process. The most ‘daring’ in this respect is standard 1.3: the inclusion of student assessment as an aspect in need of quality policy; this was often not in the picture of more traditional approaches to education and its quality assurance in European higher education. Giving attention to tests of students is in line with other developments focusing on learning outcomes, next to the more traditional interest in the educational process. In this way, the ESG has the potential to contribute to in-depth reform of education across the EHEA without setting actual norms for education.

From this perspective, another important element of the ESG is that teaching staff should be ‘qualified and competent’ (standard 1.4). Traditionally, external quality assessment tended to check if teaching staff were qualified, by looking at the proportion of holders of Master’s or Doctoral degrees. Adding ‘and competent’ seems innocuous, but it breaks open the automatic assumption that qualified automatically means competent: teaching in mass higher education systems is a profession of its own, which can (and must) be learned and which does not come automatically from being a qualified researcher.

In Part 2 of the ESG, the basic message to external quality assessment agencies is that the standards of Part 1 must be applied (standard 2.1). In other words, external quality assessment must check the presence but above all also the effectiveness of an all-round educational quality policy in the units that are evaluated. The other elements in Part 2 can be summarised as requirements of due process.

The ESG remain open to interpretation. Significantly, according to our interviews, quality assessment agencies and higher education institutions in the western part of the EHEA seem to emphasise the character of the ESG as guidelines, while in the eastern part they tend to be regarded as standards.

3.4.2 *Use of ESG in reviews of quality assessment agencies*

Part 3 of the ESG applies quality assurance principles to the quality assessment agencies themselves. In particular, it is demanded that quality assessment agencies be evaluated externally every five years. A successful external review, ending in the summative judgement that the agency ‘substantially complies’ with the ESG, is a precondition for the agency being recognised in the main European forums for quality assurance in higher education, i.e. ENQA and the newly-established register EQAR (which is discussed further below). Requiring ‘substantial compliance’ may be vague, but it is a necessity in international processes, since it allows diversity. Moreover, it shows recognition of the fact that there is not a single best way to assure quality, and that quality assurance itself should be ‘fit for purpose’. The downside is that it is difficult to evaluate such vague norms—especially for the external ad hoc teams evaluating the quality assessment agencies. While it is undesirable to squeeze external reviews into a straitjacket of a standardized, box-ticking approach, it is recognised that the current practices of those reviews are very diverse. The diversity extends to the briefs for the review (with national

variations due to needs and demands in the countries concerned), the composition of review teams, the process, and the areas and levels of detail of conclusions and recommendations (Stensaker, Harvey, Huisman, Langfeldt, & Westerheijden, 2009). In the end, notwithstanding the diversity of reviews, all agencies reviewed have been accepted as full members in ENQA. At the end of 2009, then, there were 44 full members in ENQA, 43 agencies from 24 countries and one European member, the Institutional Evaluation Programme of the EUA. This is not to say that the acceptance of members has always been very easy: in eight cases, ENQA has asked for further clarification before taking a positive decision in a subsequent meeting. And in a larger number of cases, ENQA has made recommendations for improvements, often with the request for progress reports in two years' time. Although this self-regulation of quality assessment agencies may seem soft, and although it is likely to be influenced by the diplomatic environment in which ENQA operates, it is a step towards a quality culture among the agencies.

In 2008, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) became operative as the 'European register of quality assurance agencies, covering public, private, and thematic agencies, operating or planning to operate in Europe' (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2009, p. 31). Developed by ENQA and the other members of the E4, it followed an earlier effort to design a similar quality assurance forum and clearinghouse of information in 2001 which had failed due to resistance among university rectors (Sursock, 2001). The value-added of the EQAR in relation to ENQA should be a wider coverage of trustworthy quality assurance agencies. The EQAR has a sophisticated governance structure, in which all E4 stakeholder parties are represented. Its Register committee met three times in the first year of EQAR's operation to decide on applications of agencies. Out of the 22 applications considered, one application was rejected and three were withdrawn (Register Committee EQAR, 2009), leading to 17 agencies being listed (www.eqar.eu). All EQAR-listed agencies are also full members of ENQA. One of the drawbacks of this system appears to be that, on the basis of the same ESG and the same reviews, different bodies reach different conclusions (accepted by ENQA but not by EQAR), a situation which may be difficult to explain to general audiences.

3.5 Process dynamics regarding quality assurance

The E4 appear to be an effective way to integrate the major internal stakeholders into Bologna Process policy-making. How are the organisations in the E4 related to their constituencies? In general, there is cooperation at the top while in some countries students and academics voice dissatisfaction about the Bologna Process (see also chapter 9); this is a common tension in democratic societies but a tension nevertheless.

EQAR's governance includes many more organisations than the E4, which may be a way to include the EHEA partners including more groups of external stakeholders and in that way broaden the base of trust in the EQAR as a major platform for quality of higher education across the EHEA. More time will be needed in order to show if EQAR can make this potential into an actual advantage.

Trust is crucial to smooth (inter-)national mobility. In the end, recognition of credits's and degrees depends on the recognition offices in higher education institutions, and on the companies and agencies that decide to hire graduates. Official policies such as European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education's (ECA) mutual recognitions can only

create conditions for a high-trust situation; they cannot enforce it. The same goes for the combination of ESG and QF-EHEA, although ENQA has high hopes (Bienefeld, et al., 2008). To secure trust in policies and to develop quality cultures in higher education institutions, approaches based on the involvement of teaching staff may be crucial: the Tuning project (see next chapter) and other subject-specific projects, such as the common activities of the conservatoires in their organisation AEC and Erasmus-project Polifonia, external examiners with an 'EHEA'-mindset, etc. Other bottom-up approaches include EUA's project report on how quality assurance could stimulate rather than stifle organisational creativity (QAHECA consortium, 2009) and which addresses elements of quality assurance other than the ESG, covering mainly internal but also external procedures.

3.6 The assessment of cooperation in quality assurance

Main goals stated

- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies (1999).
- An agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies (2003).
- A European register of quality assurance agencies (EQAR) based on national review (2005).

What was the situation ten years ago, before the Bologna Process?

- Most countries had introduced forms of quality assurance in the 1980s-1990s, in response to national concerns. In Central and Eastern Europe, accreditation had been introduced to support the major transformation of higher education to the needs of a post-communist society. In other parts of Europe, massification and budget restrictions had necessitated new steering mechanisms for higher education, often including internal and external quality assurance but mostly without accreditation.
- Diversity was the axiom of European higher education policy. International standards of higher education and international compatibility were considerations mainly in small countries and in the countries going through post-communist transition.
- International networks of quality assessment agencies were emerging around the turn of the century (ENQA for the EU, CEEN in Central and Eastern Europe, INQAAHE worldwide), focusing on professionalization of the agencies first of all but with interest in international aspects of their quality judgements as well.

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

- The most common adaptation until 2005 was the introduction of accreditation (with a clear yes/no outcome) or similar procedures to increase international transparency on

the status of qualifications. Participation of learners and international representatives is common now in many quality assurance systems.

- Further adaptations of quality assurance were spurred by the ESG: for external quality assessment agencies the requirement that they themselves be evaluated on a regular basis was new, while for higher education institutions the ESG called for internal quality assurance of areas that had not always been covered before. The most profound impact on quality assurance came, however, from the stipulation in the ECTS that was made even more explicit in the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (QF-EHEA) that curricula should be designed from a student perspective, with learning outcomes and student workload as main pillars.

Assessment

- All countries but one apply internal and external quality assurance on a system-wide scale.
 - This does not imply that all higher education institutions in these countries have functioning internal quality management. This is a major issue in Part 1 of the ESG and therefore will be evaluated through ESG-guided external reviews in future.
 - Applying compatible quality assurance systems does not guarantee the delivery of compatible quality of education. This must result from combined meaningful learning outcomes (ECTS) and qualifications frameworks (QF-EHEA and NQFs).
- The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) have been established (2005).
- The EQAR is established and operative (2008).
- ESG reviews of quality assessment agencies are in progress: ENQA reviewed 44 agencies, all judged positively; EQAR listed 17 agencies (as of late 2009).
- With continued attention to the use of all parts of the ESG in future, the formal elements of cooperation in quality assurance may be said to have been achieved. Attention should turn now to increasing compatibility of practices to ensure higher levels of confidence in the quality of higher education EHEA-wide.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful?

- The adoption of the ESG is a significant achievement of international cooperation in the Bologna Process, especially in light of its connection since 2008 with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which is the first mechanism in Europe intended to identify bona fide quality assurance agencies operating within the EHEA, independent of their status (public or private) or origin (inside or outside the EHEA).
- By the end of 2009, 17 quality assessment agencies had successfully been evaluated for 'substantial compliance' with the ESG and were registered on the EQAR. Forty four quality assessment agencies were accepted as full members of ENQA also on the basis of substantial compliance with the ESG (these include all EQAR-registered agencies).

- Quality assurance systems, partly due to EHEA-level targets, now often include international reviewers in visiting teams and representation of students' views. Other stakeholders (e.g. professional organisations) remain less visible in visiting teams in most quality assurance systems.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be less successful?

- Our case study of three countries showed that in quality assurance, as in degree reform, national histories and national agendas are strong drivers of the actual changes made. Measures for EHEA-wide compatibility have not yet led to the increase in trust needed to make 'stressless' international recognition of degrees a common practice. At the moment, the ESG reviews of quality assessment agencies vary so much in their actual processes that it would be unreasonable to expect them to result in an increase in international trust in the short-term, although until ESG and QF-EHEA have been implemented in more countries, we cannot make this a firm conclusion.
- Implementation of the new quality demands from the ESG and QF-EHEA at the level of study programmes in higher education institutions has only just started in many countries. Internal and external quality assurance systems designed in line with the ESG are found in 16 higher education systems.
- The quality assurance measures in the Bologna Process focus on the activities of the legislature and of (national, regional or specialised) quality assessment agencies. This tends to be a top-down approach, which within higher education institutions may lead to the reaction that these are externally-imposed requirements rather than instruments owned by academics and learners to develop a quality culture. Discipline-based initiatives such as the Tuning project are important complementary actions to engender more 'shop-floor' level involvement in the Bologna Process.

4 Qualifications frameworks

4.1 Dynamics of the action area

In the Bologna Process, several efforts have been made to get closer to the aim of simplifying mobility for students and graduates, whether between higher education institutions within countries, within the EHEA or worldwide. However, establishing similar degree structures, reorganising curricula into ECTS-compatible¹ modules (see chapter 2), sharing information about degrees and grades through a Diploma Supplement and establishing compatibility of quality assurance e.g. through the ESG² (see previous chapter) still leaves unanswered the question of the extent to which what students learn in higher education is compatible or comparable across the EHEA. That is what qualifications frameworks aim to do: provide a general description of what learners bearing a certain testimonial typically are competent in (in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes) so that testimonials become comparable (Bienefeld, et al., 2008); they aim to increase transparency, progression and portability as well as widening access (Fernie & Pilcher, 2009; Young, 2007). ‘This methodology, however, can function successfully only if used in common agreement and in a consistent way by all Bologna countries’ (Stastna, 2008, p. 5).

In the Bologna Declaration, the term ‘qualification’ was only mentioned in the requirement placed on the first-cycle degree to be ‘an appropriate level of qualification’ at the European labour market. At the Berlin follow-up conference, Ministers asked for the development of a qualifications framework ‘in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile’ (Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2003). The ministers specified that ‘First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.’ This refers to the ‘Dublin Descriptors’, which were adopted as the core of the EHEA qualifications framework (QF-EHEA) at the follow-up conference in 2005 in Bergen. The QF-EHEA includes descriptors for the three cycles, and is open to ‘including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications’ (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2005), which—in the first cycle—are especially seen as means for widening access (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2009).

There is also a second aim: ‘The development of national qualifications frameworks is an important step towards the implementation of lifelong learning’ (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2009). The QF-EHEA moves towards the role played by the EU’s qualifications framework (EQF-LLL).

A working group led by the Council of Europe, which has appeared as a major source of expertise on matters of qualifications frameworks in Europe, in co-operation with the European Commission, has taken up the activities around development of the qualifications frameworks for the EHEA.

¹ European Credit Transfer System.

² European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

4.2 Implementation at national level

The crucial step in operationalisation is to map national qualifications on to the EHEA-wide meta-framework. Systems that already had National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) since the early 2000s, like Ireland and Scotland, could do this quickly, and could prove so through the self-certification process that has been agreed. In fact these two systems' reports act as models for the self-certification process. Yet elsewhere NQFs have had to be developed and introducing them is a complex task and on the whole progress has been slow; thoroughness of the translation process should be the priority rather than rushing to meet the original 2010 deadline (Stastna, 2008, p. 13). At the time of the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial meeting, there were six self-certified NQFs, including Ireland and Scotland. The other four were: Belgium (Flemish community), Germany, the Netherlands and England/Wales/Northern Ireland. Later in 2009, Denmark and Malta were added. The aim now is to have all verifications finished by 2012. NQFs function within specific higher education and labour market contexts (Ferne & Pilcher, 2009), so that quick impact must not be expected: Scotland's qualifications framework (SCQF) may have been introduced in 2001 but was embedded in reforms that began in the 1980s (Raffe, 2007). With an eye on compatibility and mobility, it may also be useful to benchmark the resulting learning outcomes and academic standards internationally.

The final step in implementing qualifications frameworks is curriculum adaptation to focus on the agreed learning outcomes, which will happen in many countries only after 2012. Countries are showing themselves to be slightly in favour of assisting higher education institutions to develop curricula that are genuinely based on the qualifications framework by defining sectoral frameworks, building on, for example, the descriptors of the 'Tuning' project (see below). A similar approach in South Africa led to a vicious circle of increasingly detailed prescriptions and at most superficial compliance by higher education institutions (Allais, 2007; Blackmur, 2004). As remarked earlier in the Bologna Process: 'one of the concerns of the Qualifications Frameworks coordination group is that higher education institutions may indeed learn how to provide a technically correct formal description of learning outcomes without actually implementing them in practice' (Rauhvargers, et al., 2009). The Bologna Process countries should take care to avoid that trap.

The Hungarian case study on quality assurance (see previous chapter) also shows the difficulty of in-depth reform of standard operating procedures or attitudes when it comes to adapting curriculum design to the appearance of learning outcomes on the scene. It has been argued that learning outcomes as defined in qualifications frameworks cannot *define* curricula (Young, 2007), moreover curricula and qualifications remain dependent on context e.g. higher education cultures and national labour markets (Ferne & Pilcher, 2009). Using the QF-EHEA and quality assurance as used in the Bologna Process for curriculum reform is therefore a complex and time-consuming process.

A major consequence of having both the ESG for quality assurance and the QF-EHEA in a connected system (Stastna, 2008, p. 7) would be that a high level of trust could be put into degrees from study programmes that are fulfilling the quality assurance standards and the QF-EHEA. High trust, and its documentation in the Diploma Supplement, according to ENQA ought to lead to 'eliminat[ing] a requirement to consider qualifications on a case by case basis for recognition. Trust grows across the system through the intertwining of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance, and with trust grows mutual

recognition.’ (Bienefeld, et al., 2008, p. 44). Much effort—and time—will be needed until such a situation can be reached.

4.2.1 *Relationship between the QF-EHEA and the EQF-LLL*

In the Bologna Process, the focus is on higher education only. The EU has developed its qualifications framework in the perspective of lifelong learning across all education levels, ‘almost independently of the developments of QF-EHEA’ (Stastna, 2008). The European Parliament in 2008 adopted as Recommendation 2008/C 111/01 an eight-level EU qualifications framework for lifelong learning. Levels 5 to 8 of the EQF-LLL cover higher education and were explicitly meant to be ‘compatible with the framework for the European Higher Education Area and cycle descriptors agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education in 45 European countries’ (2008/C 111/01)—though actual wordings were different. The Ministers at the 2007 London follow-up conference noted that they were ‘satisfied’ about the degree of compatibility between the two European qualifications frameworks; in 2009 they called for ‘continued coordination’.

Malta, in the self-certification of its NQF of 2009, referenced against both the QF-EHEA and the EQF-LLL at the same time. This shows that it is unproblematic to develop an NQF compatible with both meta-frameworks.

4.2.2 *Relationship with the ‘Tuning’ project*

Both the QF-EHEA and the ESG are measures defined at the levels of the EHEA and higher education systems in the Bologna Process; they remain at considerable levels of abstraction as they talk about *all* study programmes in *all* areas of knowledge. The opposite approach has been taken since 2000 by the EU-supported project ‘Tuning Educational Structures in Europe’ (or ‘Tuning’, for short; <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu>). Its aim is ‘to (re-)design, develop, implement, ‘evaluate and enhance quality first, second and third cycle degree programmes’, by developing ‘a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications in each of the (potential) signatory countries of the Bologna Process, which should be described in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile’ for the different areas of knowledge. Thus, Tuning ‘reference points’ or lists of competences exist for, e.g. physics, chemistry, European studies, occupational therapy and history. The unique element in the Tuning approach is that it is a ‘shop-floor’ initiative, building on working groups of academics active in teaching (in almost 30 areas of knowledge), and thus generating guidelines for curriculum reform at the level where such reforms are made. The project has been attracting much attention all over Europe (and beyond, as will be shown in chapter 8) and has acquired an important status. Tuning-like subject-level learning outcome agreements or definitions have to work in the broad meta-framework of the QF-EHEA.

4.3 **Assessment with regard to qualifications frameworks**

Main goals stated

- An overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area [QF-EHEA] (2003).

- Member States should elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems (2003), by 2010 (deadline defined in 2005; deadline extended to 2012 in 2009).

What was different ten years ago, before Bologna?

Qualifications frameworks in terms of learning outcomes and graduates' competences were hardly heard of in higher education. Ireland and UK-Scotland belonged to the forerunner countries in the world where qualification issues were discussed. Qualifications frameworks became an action line in the Bologna Process from 2003 onwards.

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

- Establishing the QF-EHEA is a major achievement. It carries promises to ease recognition and mobility, both within and across countries. The role of the QF-EHEA in promoting the global dimension was re-emphasised in the London communiqué (2007).
- Qualifications frameworks are at the crossroads between degree structures (including short degrees), quality assurance, recognition and the social dimension (flexible learning paths, recognition of prior learning).
- Parties concerned are satisfied that the QF-EHEA is in the main coordinated with the EQF-LLL of the EU. One country (Malta) self-certified its NQF against both in a single exercise, showing their compatibility in practice.

Assessment

- An overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area [QF-EHEA] has been adopted (2005).
- Eight higher education systems have self-certified national qualification frameworks. The extension of the deadline shows that more effort is needed here.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful or less successful?

- Implementation of national qualifications frameworks remains on the agenda of ministers; they now urge all countries to achieve implementation by 2012.
- How the arrival of the ESG and the QF-EHEA together with national qualifications frameworks will actually have impact on the quality of higher education being delivered to learners will depend on curriculum reform by higher education institutions, taking place within national qualifications frameworks.
 - Thoroughness of approach is more important than rushing to meet deadlines, yet maintaining speed of process is important because of the crucial place of qualifications frameworks in easing recognition and hence mobility.
 - Commitment of academics, curriculum and quality officers in higher education institutions is the main critical success factor.

- Support and guidance from national and European levels remain important; the Coordination Group for qualifications frameworks, led by the Council of Europe, is a natural place for these tasks at the EHEA-level.
- Trust at the ‘shop-floor’ level in higher education institutions and in the rest of society that application of the QF-EHEA in national qualifications frameworks stands for a common European level of higher education is crucial for the smooth recognition of credits and degrees both within and among countries. Regulations can only create conditions for a high-trust situation, they cannot enforce it. Communication policies and subject-level approaches such as the Tuning project may play a role in this respect.

5 International recognition of degrees

5.1 Degree recognition in the European Higher Education Area

Recognition of credits and degrees internationally is one of the cornerstones of the Bologna Process. Growing international mobility demands agreements on the value of credits and qualifications, and recognition fulfils this need. Without recognition of credits and qualifications, the EHEA would remain a patchwork of different systems without any routes for educational exchanges.

The importance of recognition for the emergence of an EHEA was already clear in the 1998 Sorbonne declaration. In Bologna, a year later, the recognition topic remained central. Transparency in the diversity of European national systems became a core objective, particularly as a driver of student and professional mobility and for the attractiveness of the EHEA.

This chapter will assess to what extent the (intermediate) goals in the area of recognition have been achieved and to what extent these achievements can be attributed to the Bologna Process. The focus will be on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and of various transparency instruments.

5.2 Recognition instruments in the Bologna Process

The purpose of recognition within the Bologna Process is to make it possible for learners to use their qualifications from one education system in another education system (or country) without losing the real value of those qualifications. The main international legal text that aims to further the fair recognition of qualifications is the 1997 Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention, LRC). This is the only legally binding text in the Bologna Process. Tools that further facilitate the recognition of qualifications are the Diploma Supplement (DS), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS; see chapter 2), and the EHEA Qualification Framework (QF-EHEA; see chapter 4). In addition to these recognition instruments, some other initiatives to facilitate academic recognition have developed outside the Bologna framework, mainly focusing on the use of learning outcomes and competences for the purpose of international recognition.

The process of increasing transparency and improving recognition is further facilitated by the ENIC and NARIC centres in each of the countries, which have the mission to gather and disseminate information about higher education (credentials) abroad. To help develop good practice and a common understanding of recognition, the Council of Europe, UNESCO/CEPES and the European Commission coordinate the ENIC and NARIC Networks. They develop good practice and policy, whereas individual member centres may provide information on the recognition of qualifications as well as the qualifications frameworks and education systems of the countries for which they are responsible.

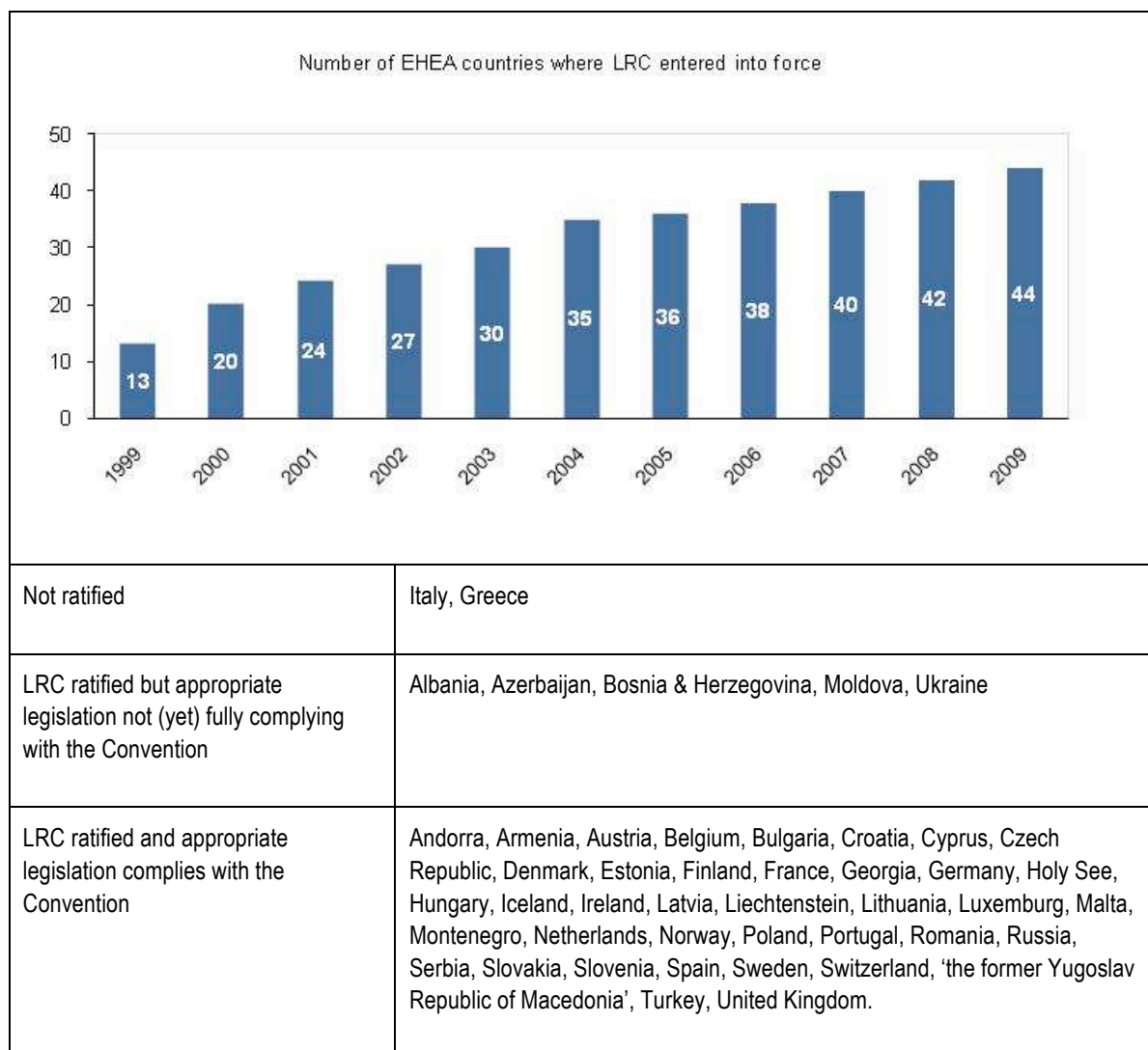
5.2.1 Recognition of qualifications: The Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is a multilateral legal framework designed to facilitate the international recognition of higher education qualifications and periods of study. The LRC mainly addresses academic recognition. Academic recognition refers to decisions that either allow a person to access or continue higher education or that confer the right to use a national title or degree from the host country on the basis of a title or degree acquired in the country of origin. Professional recognition on the other hand relates to the procedures for evaluating credentials for work purposes and therefore is linked both to the organisation of the professions and the system of education. Professional recognition is not mentioned in the text of the LRC explicitly, but the Convention does mention the role of recognition in facilitating access to the labour market.

Each signatory country shall recognise qualifications—whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees—as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are *substantial differences* between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought. Recognition of higher education qualifications means that qualification holders have access to further higher education studies—restricted only by the same conditions as candidates from the host country—and that they are entitled to use the academic title, again subject to the laws and regulations of the host country. By signing the LRC, countries also agree to provide all the necessary information on the institutions and programmes in their higher education system and to appoint a specific national information centre that will provide information and advice on recognition issues to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons. By January 2010, the LRC had entered into force in 44 out of the 46 EHEA countries. Italy has signed the convention but has not yet ratified it. Greece has not yet signed the convention (see Figure 5-1).

The fact that nearly all EHEA countries have adopted the Lisbon Convention does not automatically mean that procedures, policies and instruments have been harmonized. The lack of harmonisation came to the fore in an analysis of national action plans on recognition (Rauhvargers and Rusakova, 2008). The report concluded that there is a long way to go before there is a coherent approach to recognition of qualifications within the EHEA. As regards the practical implementation of the principles of the LRC, the analysis of the national action plans showed that the interpretation of these principles, as well as recognition procedures and even terminology used in different countries, differ greatly. It was recommended therefore that there should be more clarity in the terminology used and that there should be a move towards more coherent criteria and procedures across Europe. A start towards more coherence has been made by exploring the possibility of a blueprint for these action plans.

Figure 5-1 Adoption of the Lisbon Recognition Convention over time



Sources: Council of Europe, 2009; National Reports 2007-2009; National Experts.

Although the Bologna Process and the LRC do not primarily deal with professional recognition of qualifications, professional recognition is obviously very closely linked to academic recognition and also to the notion of employability. Professional recognition in the European Union is regulated by EU directives and can therefore not be considered a Bologna instrument as such. Obviously, the transposition of this directive is only compulsory in the Member States of the European Union and not in the other countries of the EHEA.

In the assessment of qualifications, the notion of substantial differences plays an important role and is mentioned several times in the EU directives and the LRC. In relation to access for instance, it is stipulated that one can refuse to grant recognition if it can be shown that there is a *substantial difference* between one's own general requirements for access and those of the party in which the qualification in question was earned. Examples of substantial differences can be differences between the kind of education (general or specialized technical education), differences in the length of study or

the presence or absence of specific subjects. A 2008 survey¹ showed that the interpretation of the notion of substantial differences remains an obstacle for further comparability of recognition procedures and criteria. Narrowing the bandwidth of recognition decisions to a more consistent level across Europe will be very much dependent on the consistent interpretation of substantial differences. Reaching consistency however demands the emergence of a common attitude towards recognition and will therefore be a major challenge. Advancement in this discussion might be found in linking the issue to the place of qualifications in national qualifications frameworks.

5.2.2 *Tools for recognition: The Diploma Supplement*

One of the instruments mentioned in the LRC is the Diploma Supplement. The Joint European Diploma Supplement (DS) is a tool that can support transparency and recognition. The DS is a standardized format for provision of relevant information, which should be issued together with the qualification. It was elaborated by a joint EU, Council of Europe and UNESCO working party and tested in a Europe-wide pilot project in 1998. The DS provides information regarding the level of the qualification, the type and status of the awarding institution and the programme followed by the applicant. This information is given in such a way that it does not contain any value judgments or indications regarding possible recognition or equivalence in other countries. Information regarding workload, contents and results is provided together with important additional information (e.g. grading scale applied) thus easing the work of recognition authorities. In the DS, the function of the qualification within the national qualifications framework should be clearly stated, both with regard to admission to further studies and to the professional status of the holder.

The DS is being implemented by the Bologna countries, but not as uniformly and widely as planned. The ministers committed themselves to issuing the DS to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language by 2005. This goal was not achieved and the DS still is not implemented fully in all Bologna countries. Although implementation is progressing, the goal of issuing the DS to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language has only been accomplished by half of the countries.

Formal (legal) implementation has not always been accompanied by real action. Some country experts have indicated that although legislation is in place, the issuance of Diploma Supplements is still not commonplace. For a number of countries, this also leads to contradictory findings between the national reports and the views of national experts, where the former frequently took the national legislation as the point of departure while the latter sought to tell us about the extent to which there was actual implementation on the ground. This goes in particular for the cases of Greece and Italy. The respondents indicated that the issuance of the DS was far from common practice and did not take place at all. In Figure 5-2, location in the matrix is on the basis of the national reports, but where it is likely to differ in reality this is indicated in the footnotes.

¹ 'Survey on Substantial Differences', a joint project of the NARICs of the Netherlands, the UK, Lithuania and Norway. The outcomes will be published in 2010 as part of the Council of Europe's Higher Education Series.

Figure 5-2: Adoption of the Diploma Supplement

| What percentage of higher education institutions award the Diploma Supplement? | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------|---|--|---|
| Is the DS awarded? in your country? | | None | Partially in some of the HEIs | In 25%-89% of HEIs in at least some cycles | In more than 90% of all HEIs |
| | No | Ukraine | | | |
| | Yes, on request and free of charge | | Bulgaria Russia ¹ The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ² | Spain | Albania Azerbaijan Holy See Turkey |
| | Yes, automatically and free of charge | | | Armenia Bulgaria Croatia Cyprus Ireland ³ Malta Slovak Republic | Andorra ⁴ Austria Belgium Bosnia-Herzegovina Czech Republic Denmark Estonia ⁵ Finland France ⁶ Georgia Germany ⁷ Greece ⁸ Hungary Iceland Italy ⁸ Latvia Liechtenstein Lithuania Luxembourg Moldova Montenegro Netherlands Norway Poland Portugal Romania Serbia Slovenia Sweden Switzerland |

1. Higher education institutions have the right to set their own conditions for the issue of the DS.

2. The Law on HE makes the Diploma Supplement obligatory for the 3 cycles. HEIs will have to introduce the automatic awarding.

3. Based on a 2008 survey DS was used in 75% of all institutions

4. To be implemented in June 2010.

5. Upon request for Bachelor's students.

6. Coverage of the system might be overstated and be significantly less than 90%.

7. With much diversity in the different Länder

8. Legislation is in place but implementation is still problematic and issuance is not common practice.

An important issue that has been addressed in other reports (for instance *Bologna with Student Eyes* 2009 and the 2009 *Stocktaking* report) is the lack of awareness of the Diploma Supplement. In many countries students and especially employers are not aware of the DS, let alone of its value.

5.2.3 Tools for recognition: ECTS

While the discussion of recognition so far in this chapter has primarily focused on the recognition of qualifications, the recognition of credits plays an important role in Bologna as well. In the Erasmus programme, the ECTS was introduced as a currency for learning in Europe through which exchanges could be assessed and study abroad periods could be recognised. By 2010, all countries involved in the Bologna Process had at least implemented a credit system and nearly all programmes in the EHEA are now expressed in terms of ECTS credits or through an ECTS compatible credit system (see chapter two for a detailed assessment of the implementation of ECTS). Now that the ECTS credit system—or a compatible version—is implemented in virtually all Bologna countries, the discussion has shifted to the way the system has been implemented and the actual content behind the credits.

Credits expressed in terms of learning outcomes can be a powerful way to recognise and quantify learning achievement from different contexts (see for instance: Adams, 2008). The addition of the learning outcomes dimension has the potential to improve the effectiveness of ECTS as a true European framework. There are difficulties associated with the definition and understanding of ECTS credits in terms of learning outcomes and workload—as to whether learning outcomes or workload takes primacy in the definition of a credit. It is clear that complex national and institutional credit systems must seamlessly articulate with national qualifications frameworks and international overarching frameworks and one way to achieve this is by universal application of credits based on a common understanding of learning outcomes. The 2008 ECTS user's guide provides guidelines to deal with this issue (see chapter two).

5.2.4 Tools for recognition: Qualifications frameworks

The overarching EHEA qualifications framework adopted in 2005 is strongly linked to the development of degree structures, to quality assurance and to the social dimension of the Bologna Process but is also an increasingly important tool for recognition. The introduction of national qualification frameworks and their alignment with the European framework has the potential to lead to a much clearer understanding of qualifications and as a result they can improve the process of recognition. For a detailed treatment and assessment of qualification frameworks, we refer to chapter 4.

5.2.5 The recognition of prior learning

Countries focus on the recognition of prior learning in order to encourage more adults into higher education and to stimulate lifelong learning. Recognition of prior learning activities obviously also has a close connection with diploma mobility and labour market mobility. International recognition and admission to degree programmes should not just be based on competences that have been developed in formal learning situations but should also be able to take into account learning that has taken place in other situations. Recognition of prior learning has however been predominantly dealt with in the

framework of the social dimension of the Bologna Process and therefore the assessment of this issue will be dealt with in chapter 6.

5.2.6 *Other initiatives outside the Bologna Framework impacting on recognition*

Other initiatives have been developed outside the Bologna framework, but have impacted on the extent of international recognition in the EHEA and are therefore mentioned here. One initiative at the EU level has been the Europass instrument. Europass consists of several documents that can be used to show a student's competences.

Another important European initiative closely related to the Bologna Process is the Tuning project, which has been discussed in chapter 4. The main aim and objective of the project is to contribute to the development of a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications in each of the Bologna countries. This framework should be described in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. Tuning has also created a link between learning outcomes, competences and ECTS workload-based credits.

5.3 The assessment of recognition policies

Main goals stated

- Implementation of the Diploma Supplement as a tool to make degrees easily readable and comparable (1999).
- A system of credits should be established—such as in the ECTS—as a means to recognise learning (also lifelong learning) by the universities concerned (1999).
- The Lisbon Recognition Convention should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process and every learner should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge (2005).

What was the situation ten years ago, before the Bologna Process?

- Many initiatives aimed at creating greater transparency in higher education surfaced in the past decades. Several of them emerged before the Bologna Declaration and were subsequently formally incorporated into the process. This applies inter alia to the LRC, ECTS and the DS. The Lisbon Recognition Convention emerged within the framework of the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The Diploma Supplement was developed jointly by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Other measures on recognition such as ECTS, ENICs and NARICs were developed in the EU, Council of Europe and UNESCO frameworks.

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

- The main legal framework for academic recognition is the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The LRC has now been ratified by all but two countries in the EHEA (Greece and Italy). In most countries, national legislation now complies with the Convention at least formally. Exceptions are Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Moldova and Ukraine.

- The Diploma Supplement is now issued automatically and free of charge by most higher education institutions in 30 of the 46 countries. The formal adoption of the Diploma Supplement has thus progressed in the last ten years.
- The ECTS has now been adopted in 43 EHEA countries. Other EU measures relevant to recognition have not been adopted in the Bologna framework and therefore only have legal effect in the 27 EU countries (and sometimes in the EEA countries). Most important here are the directives related to the recognition of professional qualifications.

Assessment

- Introduction of ECTS: see chapter 2 on degree and curriculum reform.
- Of all Bologna countries, 2 have not yet signed or ratified the LRC, 5 have signed and ratified the LRC but their legislation is not in compliance with the LRC and 39 countries have signed and ratified the LRC and their legislation complies with the provisions of the LRC. Ratification and adaptation of legislation are to be completed in the remaining countries.
- The Diploma Supplement is issued automatically and free of charge in most higher education institutions in 30 out of 46 countries. This needs further attention in the other 16 countries and in the remaining higher education institutions in the 30 countries.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful?

- The near EHEA-wide implementation of formal Bologna requirements such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention has been a major achievement. The progress in (almost) achieving this has shifted the discussion to a more detailed level of realising the impacts intended by the measures.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be less successful?

Some major remaining issues are associated with making instruments such as the Lisbon Recognition convention work in practice.

- There are different interpretations of the notion of ‘substantial differences’ and other terms and practices around recognition. While room for interpretation is necessary, this does create uncertainty and requires more attention.
- The use of learning outcomes as a determinant for recognition has an obvious role to play in making qualifications more transparent for learners, credential evaluators and employers. If qualifications are described in terms of learning outcomes the process of evaluation and recognition will be simplified and better informed thus allowing fairer judgments to be made. Furthermore, learning outcomes will help the systematic recording of information about qualifications in Diploma Supplements.
- The awareness of the existence and meaning of the Diploma Supplement among learners and employers still needs to be improved.

- The Bologna Ministers committed themselves to issuing the Diploma Supplement to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language by 2005. This goal has not yet been achieved fully in all Bologna countries.

6 Policies on widening access to and increasing participation in higher education

6.1 Development of the social dimension in the Bologna Process

The social dimension was first mentioned in the Prague Communiqué (2001) as an issue raised by students, and was affirmed by ministers as something to be explored. In the Berlin Communiqué (2003), the role of the social dimension became clear: ‘The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level.’ In the London Communiqué (2007), the role of the social dimension was also linked to the general role of higher education: ‘raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society.’ The importance of ‘maximising the talents and capacities of all citizens’ through higher education is reiterated in the Leuven Communiqué (2009) in particular given ‘the challenge of an ageing population’.

Despite being mentioned in early ministerial communiqués, the social dimension action line remained without a systematic approach and clear definitions of its means and goals for a long time. The most explicit statements in relation to goals can be found in the London Communiqué (2007): ‘The student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of populations’. Based on this definition we can differentiate three interrelated goals in the social dimension:

- Promotion of wider access to higher education.
- Increasing participation.
- Ensuring the completion of studies for all groups.

The need to ‘reflect diversity of populations’ places special emphasis on under-represented groups and their better inclusion in higher education.

The social dimension is an overarching action area in the Bologna Process, and one that continues to change and develop. Thus, for instance the concept of participation is expanding and moving away from referring only to access to higher education to also encompass successful completion of studies in all cycles of higher education. This continuing expansion of the social dimension enables, on the one hand, a more complete perception of the dimension, and, on the other, highlights the need for greater attention to this topic.

Looking in more detail at the social dimension goals, we can see that widening access is related to increasing the flexibility and transparency of mechanisms, procedures and requirements for access to higher education to ensure the adequate inclusion of individuals from all social groups. Increasing participation refers to ensuring equal opportunities to participate in higher education especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, which means it concerns the achievement of a good representation of all social groups rather than necessarily entailing a rise in the number of students in higher education overall. Completion of studies refers to ensuring that all students are able to

complete their studies without any hindrance due to their disadvantaged backgrounds. It is thus related to the provision of necessary and sufficient conditions for a healthy study environment and the avoidance of discrimination in the chances of completion related to students' social and economic backgrounds.

The ministerial communiqués do not state clear means to achieve these goals. The London Communiqué (2007) calls for the development of national strategies and policies for the social dimension and the Leuven Communiqué (2009) for 'setting measurable targets for ... increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the next decade. Efforts to achieve equity in higher education should be complemented by actions in other parts of the educational system.' Accordingly, a wide diversity of means is to be expected, as exemplified in our case studies. Nonetheless, it was possible to identify four 'core' groups of means: flexibility in admission to higher education, flexibility in the provision of higher education, student services and student finances.

6.2 Overview of the indicators across the EHEA countries

Assessing the effects of the Bologna Process on the achievement of its goals and the implementation of means is difficult for the social dimension since the action area has developed as an overarching, almost transversal issue, which until recently had no clear targets or defined means. Our case studies illustrate that most of the national actions related to the social dimension are taken independently of the Bologna Process. As a consequence, our report aims to assess relevant measures without claiming that they derive from their direct links to the Bologna Process.

The indicators used to assess the social dimension and their components have been defined following the statements made in the national reports for the *Stocktaking 2009*. For some indicators, especially those of the socio-economic background of students, data were not available for all 48 higher education systems, for a number of reasons, e.g. because countries do not register certain information for ethical reasons. As a consequence, such indicators could not be incorporated into the analysis. We looked at indicators of policy means relevant for the social dimension and achievement of goals. Since the means to achieve the social dimension goals have not been defined clearly and were left to the national level, they naturally vary. Here we report on four groups of means representative of the main approaches used regarding the means.

- Transparent and flexible admission rules, e.g. recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- Flexible study paths, i.e. provision of part-time studies, courses at non-traditional times, distance learning, short-cycle degrees, modularisation of the study programmes and elective courses.
- Sufficient and widely available student services that contribute to completion of studies for different groups, e.g. availability of guidance and counselling for educational, psychological, and career matters, as well as special guidance for people with disabilities.
- Financial aid for students, i.e. direct and indirect financial aid and payments to higher education institutions.

Regarding the other set of indicators, which refer to the achievement of goals, we looked at the groups most commonly referred to as underrepresented in national reports and for which data were available: participation of females, participation by socio-economic background and educational routes to higher education.

6.3 The overall situation in the Bologna Systems

6.3.1 Means to increase and widen participation

6.3.1.1 Admission to higher education: recognition of prior learning

Admission rules can be designed in different ways to try to widen access to and increase participation in higher education. We analysed RPL as one of the key factors in widening access to higher education, especially for those who do not hold formal prior learning qualifications. In this respect, we identified five forms of implementation by looking at the statements in the national reports for the Bologna Process 2007-2009:

- Countries with nationally established RPL procedures to assess non-formal and informal prior learning as a basis for access, yet with changing degrees of application: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.
- Countries without nationally established procedures, but widespread use of RPL at the institutional level: Austria and Switzerland.
- Countries without nationally established procedures, and limited institutional level use of RPL, e.g. only in certain fields (e.g. arts, philology), as exemption from exams (e.g. language subjects) or depending on certain conditions (e.g. age): Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Malta, Poland and Serbia.
- Countries where some initiatives for the development of national level regulations for RPL have been made, yet where they are not yet in use: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Holy See, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Romania, Russia and Ukraine.
- Countries without any initiative or use of RPL: Albania, Andorra, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Slovakia, 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', and Turkey.

The case study on RPL highlighted how in France, *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* (VAP) was established in the 1980s and complemented with *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) in 2002. All types of higher education qualifications could be received fully or partly through VAE; mostly it is used in the first cycle. Individuals have the right to request validation of previous experience in the institution of their choice. Experience is recognised on the basis of the candidate's portfolio (*dossier*) and an interview with a jury. The *dossier* might include observation of the candidate in his/her work situation or in a simulated situation. Candidates can get support from higher education institutions in the process (not for free). Candidates receiving good support in preparation of the *dossier* stand a better chance for recognition and juries find it simpler to decide on the candidates' qualifications.

VAE reaches especially unemployed people of age 30–45. Diplomas attained through VAE are indistinguishable from diplomas attained through traditional learning routes, so employers equally accept them.

In sum, there are varying degrees of development and application of RPL for accessing higher education. In the majority of the Bologna higher education systems, prior learning is recognised either as a basis for access or in order to offer exemptions in certain fields.

6.3.1.2 Flexible study paths

The availability of flexible study modes are important means for widening participation. According to the data we collected on 41 higher education systems, part-time studies, courses offered during non-traditional times (e.g. weekends, evenings) and distance education are the most commonly used flexible study modes. However, only one third of the systems included in the analysis offer one or more of these modes of learning.

Another measure that can be used to widen access to higher education is short cycle degrees. We showed in chapter 2 (table 2-6) that 26 Bologna systems offer short cycle degrees, enrolling from under 2% to 30% of students. Other means to achieve flexibility are the modularisation of study programmes and the provision of elective courses. Neither of these is implemented widely, as was stated in chapter 2 as well.

We conclude that various types of flexible provision are employed in the Bologna area. However, flexibility in provision is not a widespread practice in the majority of the Bologna systems. Moreover, based on the information we gathered from the national experts, it is not possible to verify whether the flexible forms of provision were introduced explicitly for the benefit of under-represented groups, or for more general purposes.

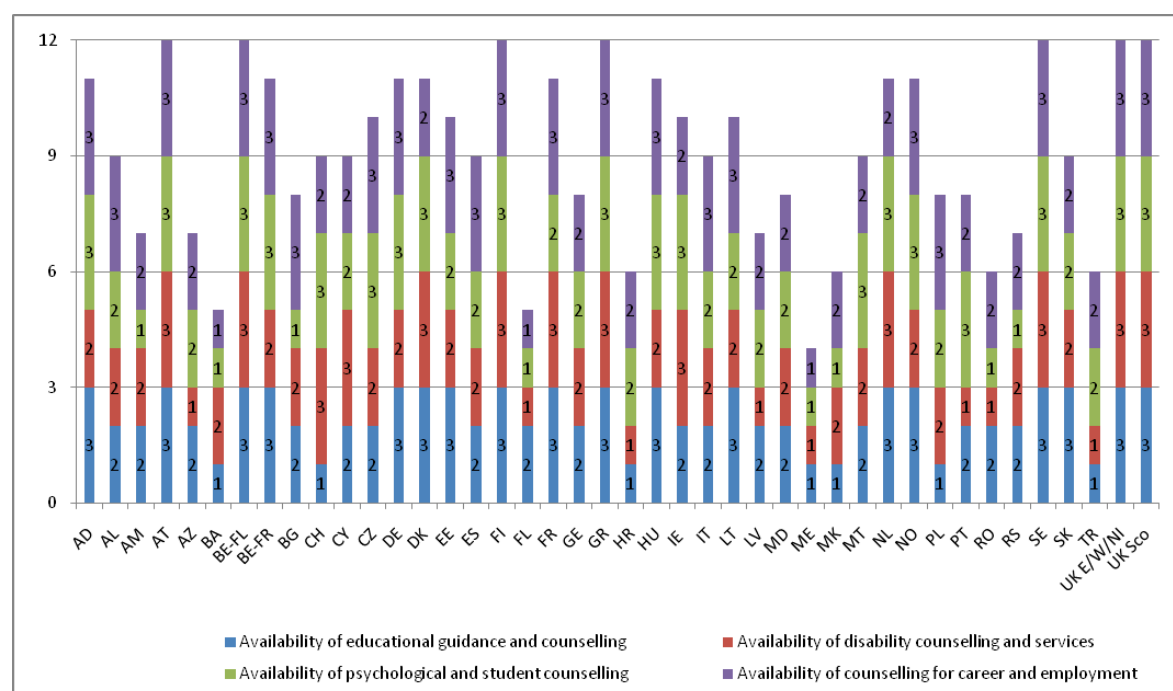
6.3.1.3 Student services: Guidance and counselling

Various student services can encourage people to study and can provide students with a healthy study environment (e.g. food, housing, health care, transportation and many other infrastructural provisions). These services are covered in detail in our case studies. Here we present data from 44 systems on guidance and counselling services.

As can be seen in Figure 6-1, in around one third of the systems, such services are widespread and in another one third services are available but with insufficiencies in quality and/or in availability. One fifth of the systems do not offer any kind of guidance and counselling service to their students. We do not have information for five of the systems.

Most systems, then, offer guidance and counselling in educational, psychological, career matters and special guidance to support people with disabilities, either at the national or institutional levels. However, quality and availability vary considerably across systems.

Figure 6-1 Guidance and counselling services (2008)



Source: Katzensteiner et al. 2008, corrected and completed by national experts

6.3.1.4 Financial support for students

Financial support for students is one of the most influential factors in encouraging participation of people from lower economic backgrounds as well as in ensuring completion of their studies. We took into consideration direct and indirect financial aid to students, as well as payments to higher education institutions as a share of total student income. The indicators included do not cover indirect financial aid to students through subsidies and other support to their families, which are widely used in some of the systems (e.g. Austria, Germany, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland), and which result in lower need for direct financial aid.

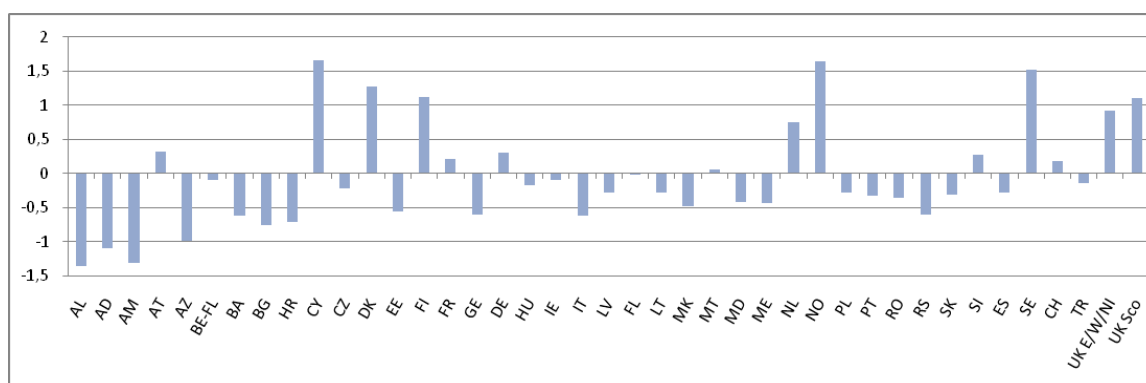
Direct financial aid is measured below with respect to: (i) the monthly median amount of scholarships, grants and loans for students¹ provided by public authorities (i.e. the municipal, regional or national level) in euros (Orr et al. 2008) and (ii) the percentage of students receiving this aid (Orr et al. 2008). Indirect aid is measured by three indicators: (iii) financial aid to students as a percentage of total public expenditure on education (ISCED 5&6) (Eurostat, 2005), (iv) the percentage of GDP devoted to tertiary education (OECD, 2005), and (v) payments to higher education institutions from the monthly student income (Orr et al., 2008).²

¹ Students in this section refer to ISCED 5A level students. Data are from 2005-2007.

² Here monthly student income refers to the mix of three major income sources: parents' or relatives' contributions, state support and income from employment (Orr et al. 2008, p. 84).

Figure 6-2 depicts the combined scores on these indicators for each system for which data is available. To avoid the misleading effect of the different economic conditions of countries, we corrected the median amount of monthly direct financial aid for students (indicator i) using GDP purchasing power parity per capita. The scores shown in the figure indicate aggregate averages of direct and indirect student financial aid¹ and offer us a view of the situation of financial aid for students across the Bologna Process systems based on the above-mentioned indicators. In the figure, 0 is the average value across countries. Bars above this imply higher than average support, bars below lower.

Figure 6-2 Relative level of direct and indirect student support



Source: Adapted from Orr et al., 2008, OECD 2005 and 2006, IMF 2009 and national statistics

Figure 6-2 shows a wide variety in the provision of financial aid to students. One group of countries is characterised by high direct financial aid for students, low student payments to higher education institutions and high percentages of GDP invested in higher education (Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Scotland and Sweden). Another group of countries is characterised by low direct financial aid to students, high student payments to higher education institutions and low percentages of GDP invested in higher education (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Croatia). The other countries fall in between these two groups.

The figures on the direct financial aid to students include all kinds of aid (e.g. scholarships, loans, grants, etc.) without indicating if students are required to pay them back or not. The European Students' Unions recently criticised current amounts of direct financial aid for students as being inadequate to cover studying and living costs (ESU, 2009, p. 28).

¹ For each indicator we calculated the cross-national average and standard deviation. Next, we calculated the distance to the average value of the respective indicator for each system. The unit of distance is the standard deviation of the respective indicator. Finally, we averaged the scores of each country's available indicators (only if at least three of the five indicators were available; otherwise the country was considered 'missing').

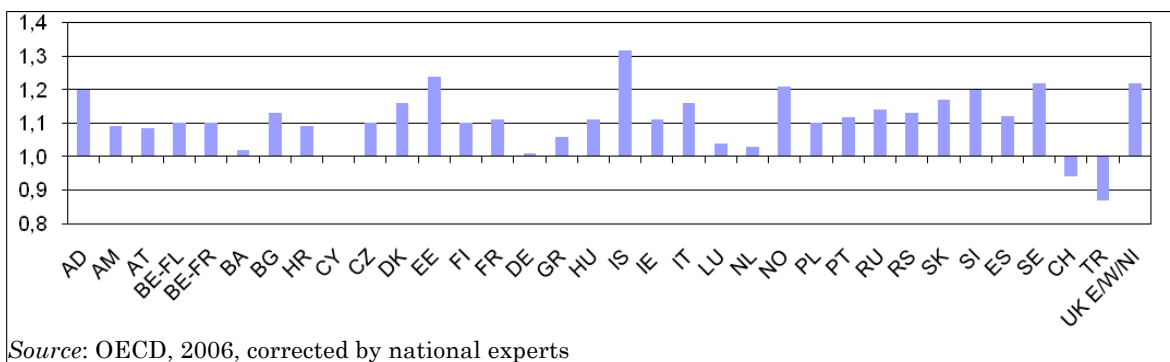
6.3.2 Achievement of Goals: Participation in Higher Education

The previous section reviewed the key indicators measuring implementation of means in the EHEA countries. This section provides an overview of participation of under-represented groups in higher education. Thirty-nine out of 48 systems report under-representation of certain groups in their student body. Commonly under-represented groups include females, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, people accessing higher education through non-traditional educational routes, people from immigrant backgrounds and ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. The last three groups are not included in our analysis due to lack of data.

6.3.2.1 Female participation

Females are often referred to as an under-represented group in the Bologna systems. Figure 6-3 shows the ratio between the percentage of female students (ISCED 5&6) and

Figure 6-3 Female enrolment ratios among 18-34 years old in population (2006)



Source: OECD, 2006, corrected by national experts

the percentage of female population (OECD 2006). A ratio of 1 means that females are equally represented in higher education and in the national population. In almost all Bologna signatory countries gender representation is either balanced or in favour of females. Figure 6-3 illustrates overall female participation in higher education. The data do not differentiate with respect to levels and fields of studies. However, under-representation of females in science disciplines and at the second and third cycles of studies is an acknowledged fact. According to OECD data in 23 of these countries, the number of male science graduates relative to their share in the population of 25-34 years olds in employment, outnumbers female science graduates in all countries except Turkey¹ (OECD 2009).

6.3.2.2 Lower socio-economic background

The socio-economic background of students was analysed for this project through two proxies: parents' educational attainment and occupational status. Due to space limitations, this section illustrates the situation only with respect to educational background; the pattern regarding occupational background was quite similar.

In Figure 6-4 we show the ratio between the percentage of students' mothers/fathers with low educational attainment among all mothers/fathers and the percentage of women/men of 40-60 years old with low educational attainment in the female/male population of the

¹ The gender balance in Turkey has become more equal in recent years (see case study in volume 2).

same age cohort (Orr et al. 2008, p. 58).¹ Low educational attainment is defined as a level of schooling at no more than ISCED 0-2 levels. A ratio of 1 indicates equal representation and values under and over this refer to under- and over-representation of this group in higher education. For example, a ratio of 0.5 could mean that while 40% of higher education students' fathers have low educational attainment, 80% of all fathers (40-60 years old males) have low education. Therefore, half of the children with poorly educated fathers are not represented in higher education.

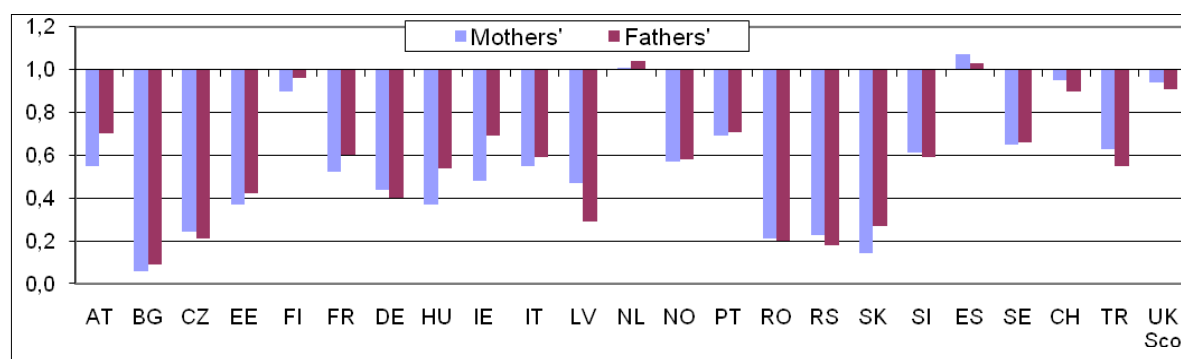
For this indicator we have data from 23 countries. In 21 of these countries students whose parents have attained at most a lower secondary education are under-represented. Only in the Netherlands and in Spain do we find a slight over-representation in comparison to the proportion in the whole population. Finland, Switzerland and Scotland are close to a balanced representation. In Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia this group of people is severely under-represented in the student body (Orr 2008, p. 62).

In most of the Bologna systems, then, parents' educational level (and occupational status) is a strong determinant of participation in higher education. People whose parents have lower educational attainment are under-represented in the vast majority of the Bologna systems for which information is available.

6.3.2.3 Participation through non-traditional educational routes

People who enter higher education from non-traditional routes are narrowly² defined as students who accessed 'higher education through validation of prior learning and work experience—with or without a higher education entrance examination' (Orr 2008, p. 41).

Figure 6-4 Participation ratios by educational background (2005-07)



Source: Orr et al. 2008; completed by national experts

Our data indicate the percentages of students³ who entered higher education through recognition of their non-formal and informal learning. We have data on 21 higher education systems. The proportion of students accessing higher education through RPL

¹ Students in this section include only ISCED 5A level students.

² The narrow definition of non-traditional students can differ from individual countries' own definitions. This definition is used for the sake of comparability.

³ Only ISCED 5A students.

ranged from 0% (in nine countries) to 15% (United Kingdom – England and Wales) (Orr et al. 2008, p. 42).¹ Moreover, in our interviews and in national reports these groups of people were stated as having difficulties regarding access to higher education.

6.4 The assessment of policies for flexibility and widened participation

Main goals stated

Widening of access

- Creation of more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education (2005), and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity (2007).
- Recognition of prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (2007).
- The student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of populations (2007). Widen participation at all levels (2007).
- Development of measurable targets for this area by each country (2009).

Improved conditions for completing studies

- Providing appropriate studying and living conditions for learners to overcome obstacles related to their social and economic background (2003).
- Helping learners, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic terms and providing them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access (2005).
- Flexible curricula (2007).
- Flexible learning, in the context of lifelong learning (2007).

Other

- Encourage equal participation in mobility programmes (2001, 2005).

What was the situation ten years ago, before the Bologna Process?

- Public good and social cohesion arguments had a place in higher education debates in different countries traditionally, with needs-based grant systems, available in a number of countries, as a clear example of policies in this direction. Although it had been mentioned before (Prague communiqué, 2001), the social dimension only became an explicit action area in the Bologna Process in 2005.
- The national level had—and still has—responsibility for developing and implementing policies to achieve participation goals, as well for assuring links with other action

¹ Probably due to the narrow definition that had to be used, France (one of our case study countries as a 'good practice' in this area) has a 0% score in the EuroStudent study (Orr et al., 2008, p. 42).

areas, for example, supporting the mobility of less-wealthy learners (e.g. through the portability of student support).

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

Since targeted social dimension actions started only recently in the Bologna Process, we cannot draw conclusions on the contribution of actions *within* the Bologna Process as yet. We can only give a short overview of the current situation.

- 39 out of 48 systems report underrepresentation of certain groups in their student body. Most commonly underrepresented groups include people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (low income and low education parents), and people coming to higher education through non-traditional educational routes.
- While participating fairly proportionally overall, females are underrepresented in science and technology programmes in almost all countries, as well as in the second and third cycles of studies.
- In the majority of Bologna higher education systems, prior learning is recognised either as a basis for access or to offer exemptions in certain fields. Widespread use of RPL is found in two groups of countries:
 - Countries with nationally established RPL procedures to assess non-formal and informal prior learning as a basis for access, yet with varying degrees of application: Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (E/W/Ni as well as Scotland). In these higher education systems, the proportion of learners accessing higher education through RPL reached up to circa 15% (United Kingdom—England, Wales and Northern Ireland).
 - Countries without nationally established procedures but with widespread application of RPL at the institutional level: Austria and Switzerland.
- Around one-third of the countries offer part-time studies, distance education, courses offered at non-traditional times (e.g. weekends, evenings) or other kinds of flexible learning modes. However, it is not possible to conclude that these modes of provision have been introduced with the aim of improved inclusion of underrepresented groups.
- Special guidance and counselling for learners is available in most higher education systems, with varying degrees of quality and availability. Most common is guidance and counselling in educational, psychological and career questions, and special guidance to support people with disabilities, offered either at national and/or institutional levels. In around one-third of the systems, such services are widespread and in another third services are available but at an insufficient level in terms of quality or availability.
- Regarding funding resources for social dimension purposes, a small number of countries in the north-west of the EHEA are characterised by high direct financial aid for learners (corrected for purchasing power parity), low student payments to higher education institutions and high percentages of GDP invested in higher education (Denmark, Finland, Sweden and UK-Scotland) while another set of countries in the south and east show low direct financial aid for learners, high student payments to

higher education institutions and low percentages of GDP invested in higher education (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia and Serbia). The other 26 systems for which we have information do not differ very much from the combined average.

Assessment

Widening of access

- 16 systems have nationally established procedures to assess prior learning as a basis for access to higher education, 2 systems show widespread usage of RPL through institutional regulations. Other systems make limited use of RPL for accessing higher education, and in 8 systems there are neither nationally established procedures for RPL nor is it used in higher education institutions. The implementation of RPL is still very much in progress.
- Flexible learning paths involve many instruments, e.g. part-time studies, non-traditional teaching times (e.g. evenings, weekends), distance education, short cycle programmes, modularisation and elective courses.
 - Modules and electives were discussed in chapter 2 on degree and curriculum reform, as were short cycle programmes.
 - Part-time studies and studies at non-traditional times are provided in most or all institutions in 20, respectively 23, higher education systems.
- In 19 systems many higher education institutions offer distance education.
- Instruments for wider access need continued attention: provision of flexible study paths in order to widen access to and increase participation in higher education is not a widespread practice.
- In most of the higher education systems that we have data for, there are not yet signs of access actually being widened, or of increasing participation of disadvantaged groups. (Note: this goal was set clearly only in 2007, which makes its assessment difficult at this moment in time.)

Improved conditions for completing studies

- Student guidance and counselling services are widely available and of reasonable quality in 19 higher education systems. This goal deserves more attention.
- In 33 higher education systems, levels of financial aid for learners are very low, which also needs more attention.

Other

- Equal participation in mobility programmes: no data available.
- There were very few signs of the social dimension being seen as a priority area in most Bologna Process countries. This needs more attention.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful?

- The case studies on increasing participation exemplify some widespread actions taken at the national level in high-performance countries, such as:
 - A clear and explicit identification of underrepresented groups and the development of tailor-made measures (i.e. educational programmes) targeted at these groups.
 - The provision of guidance and counselling to underrepresented groups at the pre-higher education levels of education.
 - The provision of sufficient financial support for learners.
- The case studies also showed that countries which have a relatively good representation of all social groups in higher education, or which have a good record of implementing methods to achieve this, have traditionally had such concerns on their policy agendas; successful social dimension policies appear to need long, sustained effort.
- Inclusion of the social dimension as an action line in the Bologna Process was stated by interviewees (national representatives in the Bologna Process) to be important for:
 - Raising awareness of participation issues in national policy making agendas.
 - Providing a platform to work on these issues at the Bologna level.
 - Providing opportunities for the participating systems to learn from each other.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be less successful?

- Direct links between the implementation of the Bologna Process and widening access, increasing participation and ensuring completion of studies are not yet evident. For instance: some means that have implications for the social dimension (e.g. RPL, modularisation) are mainly identified with other action lines (e.g. change of degree structures). Furthermore, these goals became clear only in 2007. This situation also relates to the unsystematic development of the social dimension action line.
- The social dimension does not have a high priority in all national Bologna agendas. For instance, in the national reports for *Stocktaking 2009*, 12 systems left the social dimension section completely or mostly blank. On the other hand, 22 countries included a national action plan, indicating a certain degree of awareness and in many cases the existence of supporting policies.
- The definition of underrepresented groups varies across countries depending on national dynamics and conditions (e.g. some ethnic minorities are important in some countries but hardly present in others). As a result there are a wide variety of mechanisms associated with the social dimension at a national level and this makes the formulation of common policies within the Bologna Process difficult.
- Despite the key role of the national level in achieving social dimension goals, the introduction of common frames at the Bologna level to trigger action at the national levels is seen as important by many interviewees (national and international level representatives)

- Regular collection of extensive, sufficient and comparable data on the socio-economic conditions of learners is needed to develop better guidance strategies, to monitor progress and to raise awareness at the national level. The data currently available at the Bologna level is insufficient to guide such actions.

7 Mobility within the EHEA and from the rest of the world

7.1 Mobility in the European Higher Education Area

This chapter will assess to what extent the (intermediate) goals in the area of mobility have been achieved and to what extent these achievements can be attributed to the Bologna Process. The focus will be on developments in mobility: inward mobility from outside the EHEA, internal mobility within the EHEA and the growth of study abroad experiences and educational exchanges in the EHEA.

Mobility was and has remained centre stage in the Bologna Process. Both the circulation of students and staff within the higher education area and the attractiveness of the European systems of higher education for students outside Europe were seen as important objectives in the Bologna Declaration. Throughout the process, the Ministers have emphasised the importance of mobility for academic, cultural, political, social and economic reasons.

Bologna has talked about mobility in very general terms. The 20% target in the Leuven Communiqué is the most specific statement but does not specify whether it concerns short-term mobility where credits are obtained at a foreign institution or diploma mobility, where a full degree is obtained abroad.¹ Neither does it specify whether there are different targets for different cycles. A further issue is that the targets do not take diversity of rationales for mobility (academic, cultural, etc.) into account. A dominant focus on quantitative growth risks neglecting the quality of internationalisation and mobility.

Advancing credit mobility has long been a major objective for European higher education policy. The European Union institutions in particular have fostered this type of mobility to support the development of single markets and to advance the notion of European citizenship. Credit mobility can take place through organized programmes or can be unorganized (the so-called free movers). Programmes have been initiated at the European level—with Erasmus as the EU's flagship mobility programme—or at the bi- or multilateral level. However, the majority of short-term study periods abroad (meaning less than a full programme) takes place in an unorganized manner: students organise their own travel to other countries to attend specific courses or to do internships in foreign companies or international organisations. This type of mobility is substantial, but often not registered at the institutional or national level. The best registered form of organized mobility is the mobility in European (or national/regional) mobility programmes. This however is sometimes only a fraction of the total mobility, depending on the country.

One of the major obstacles in assessing the mobility achievements in the EHEA is the poor quality of the data. Many national governments—and even many institutions—do

¹ We will refer to these types of mobility as credit mobility and diploma mobility, in line with the Eurodata study (Kelo et al., 2006). Credit mobility refers to temporary mobility in the framework of ongoing studies at a 'home institution' for the purpose of gaining credit. After the mobility phase, students return to their 'home institution' to complete their studies. Credit mobility is mostly for study, but it can also take other forms, such as a traineeship. Diploma mobility refers to mobility aimed at the acquisition of a whole degree or certificate in the country of destination.

not have the right practices in place to register mobility, and if they do, there exist various methodologies and definitions within Europe, making data very difficult to compare.

For diploma mobility, data is improving, but for credit mobility, national data are either not available or not complete. Diploma mobility is usually registered at the host country because the students have to register at the institution where they study. The main issue related to data quality is whether students are registered as foreign or international according to citizenship, according to residency or according to their prior education. At the start of the Bologna Process, most mobility was registered according to citizenship. Applying this method might lead to an incorrect registration of mobile students if students already live outside their country of citizenship and attend higher education in the country. Therefore many countries started to use the residency criterion or prior learning criterion in order to better reflect mobility in higher education.

For reasons of continuity and comparability we chose to apply the same criterion for diploma mobility as was used commonly in 1999: we refer to foreign students on the basis of *citizenship*. Even though we acknowledge this is not the best way to reflect learning mobility, we do so because it is the only possible way to compare the pre-Bologna era with the most recent data and to do so for almost the whole of the EHEA. For a full account of the data on diploma mobility we refer to the annex to this chapter.

The registration of credit mobility—and especially the credit-mobility of free movers—causes even more difficulties in terms of measurement and registration. As we noted before, much of the credit mobility within Europe is not registered nationally or on a European level. Sometimes it is registered on a national level, but in a way that cross-national comparison is not possible. As a result, there is no EHEA-wide data available on credit mobility. However, two sources might shed some light on the issue. First there are the Erasmus statistics. A second source is Eurostudent, based on an international student survey (Orr et al., 2008). Neither covers the whole EHEA: Erasmus covers the 31 Erasmus countries and Eurostudent covers 20 European countries.¹ The Erasmus statistics have a further limitation because they cover only part of the total credit mobility in Europe and that part might differ substantially per country. A shortcoming of the Eurostudent data is that it might underestimate the proportion of students with a study abroad experience, because it is based on questions to current students, much before the end of their study career, on whether they have been abroad for study reasons. Students might only have such a study abroad experience in a later stage of their study programme, after being surveyed. We will use both the Erasmus data and the Eurostudent data to give an indication of the volume of the total credit mobility in European countries.

7.2 Mobility developments in the European Higher Education Area (1999-2007)

Mobility in the EHEA consists of diploma mobility and credit mobility. Both will be discussed here. Table 7-1 shows the data for the EHEA as a whole.

¹ Eurostudent includes data from: Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Slovakia, Sweden and Turkey.

Table 7-1 Developments in diploma mobility in the EHEA (1999-2007)¹

| | 1999 | 2007 | Growth |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|
| Total number of students in the EHEA | 26,188,563 | 34,838,396 | 33% |
| All foreign students in the EHEA | 923,038 | 1,605,728 | 74% |
| as % of Total number of students | 3.5% | 4.6% | 30% |
| Foreign students from EHEA countries | 502,150 | 695,323 | 39% |
| as % of Total number of students | 1.9% | 2.0% | 4% |
| Foreign non-EHEA students | 420,888 | 910,405 | 116% |
| as % of Total number of students | 1.6% | 2.6% | 63% |

Source: UNESCO Database (with additions from National Reports 2007-2009 and national experts)

The numbers in Table 7-1 point to strong growth in foreign student numbers from outside the EHEA, while internal mobility has slowed down. One should however take into account that the numbers are relative to the total number of students, a number that has increased by a third in the period from 1999 to 2007. If we look at the absolute numbers, all types of diploma mobility have increased significantly.

7.2.1 Diploma mobility and attractiveness of the EHEA

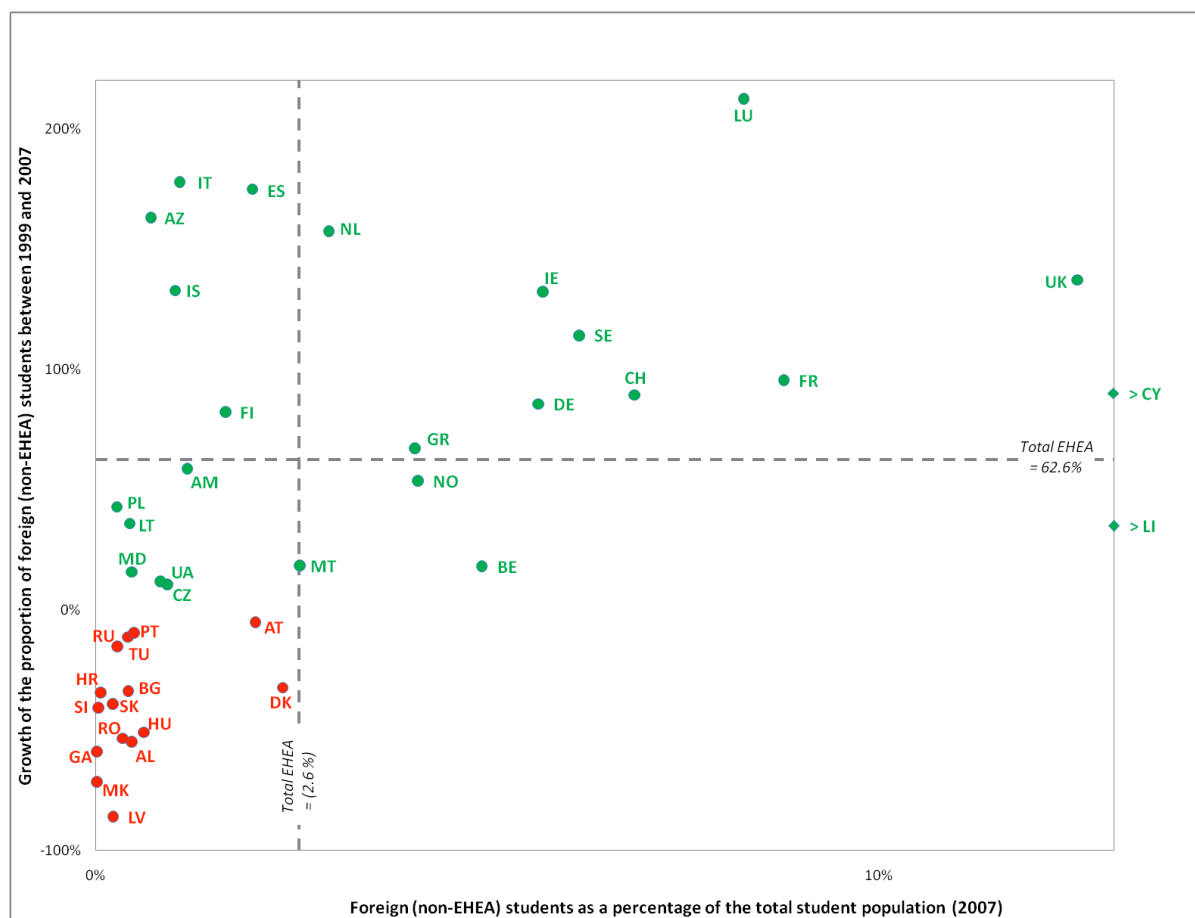
The first mobility indicator we will look at in more detail is the growth of the number of students from outside the EHEA entering the EHEA countries between 1999 and 2007. This indicates the attractiveness of the EHEA as a study destination. In the period between 2000 and 2007 the total number of foreign students globally increased from 1.9 million to 3.0 million, an increase of almost 60% (see Table 7-1). In the EHEA, the total number of foreign students increased from 420,888 in 1999 to 910,405 in 2007, an increase in the absolute number of foreign (non-EHEA) students of 116%. This is substantially more than the global increase. While the EHEA had less than 25% of the total foreign students in 1999, it had a share of over 30% in 2007.

Taking into consideration that the likelihood of growth also depends on the relative size of the foreign student population, we have plotted the growth against the proportion of foreign students in the total student population in 2007 (Figure 7-1). The upper-right quadrant of the figure represents the countries with higher than average growth and a relatively large foreign student population. Small countries like Cyprus and Liechtenstein show a student population of more than 15% and 20% respectively. In absolute numbers however these remain small study destinations. The foreign student population (as a percentage of all students) has more than doubled in Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, while it almost doubled in France, Germany, Greece and Switzerland. Other destinations that are growing substantially in popularity with

¹ This table and the graphs on mobility do not include data on Andorra, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Estonia, Holy See, Montenegro and Serbia because data was not available or unreliable for either one or both of the data points (or adjacent years). Considering the relatively small number of students in these countries, the effect of missing these data on the total EHEA numbers is unlikely to be significant.

non-EHEA students are Azerbaijan, Finland, Iceland, Italy, and Spain. Here, the ratio of non-EHEA foreign students has more than doubled in the last decade. These however remain modest study destinations in relation to their total student bodies. Belgium and Norway are relatively large players, but their growth is less than the average for the EHEA as a whole. A few relatively substantial players like Austria and Denmark underwent decreases in their share of international students. A large group of countries remain relatively minor destinations and some are even shrinking in terms of their relative foreign student body (indicated in red in Figure 7-1).

Figure 7-1 The attractiveness of the EHEA to non-EHEA students



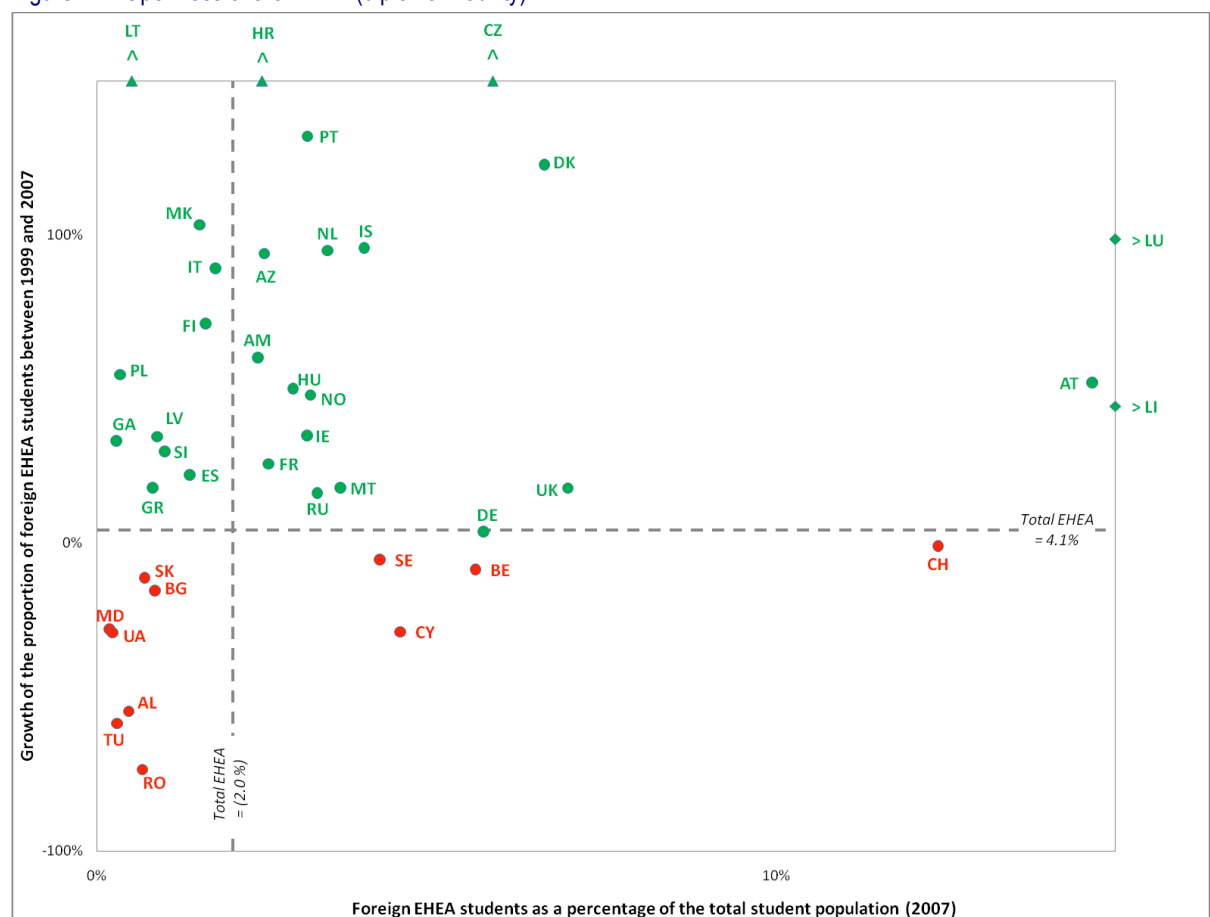
We may conclude that the EHEA has gained in popularity as a study destination. Whether this growth can be contributed to the Bologna Process is not clear, however, because we observe that the growth has particularly taken place in some countries. Existing major importers like France, Germany and the UK have strengthened their position. Some smaller players like Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden are catching up. There however remains a big group where the number of foreign students is low and is decreasing. This points to a very uneven growth of the foreign student population in the EHEA and puts into question the attractiveness of that area as such. It might better be conceived as an increase in the attractiveness of a group of individual countries. The branding and marketing campaigns in countries like France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and the UK may have had an additional positive effect on the

attractiveness of these respective countries. Another major ‘selling point’ for higher education in these countries is the provision of education in a widely spoken language. Ireland and the UK evidently benefit from the fact that English is more and more becoming the *lingua franca* of higher education in Europe. France and Spain especially benefit from the fact that French and Spanish are spoken widely in many African and Latin American countries, respectively. German is widely spoken within the EHEA but less so outside. Countries like the Netherlands and Sweden benefit from the fact that they now provide many courses in the English language and through this they appeal to a much wider market of international students.

7.2.2 Diploma mobility and openness in the EHEA

A second mobility indicator is the increase of mobility within the EHEA. The internal openness of the EHEA is measured by the increase in internal diploma mobility and the increase in the number of students with a study abroad experience in another EHEA country, be it through an internship or through attendance of courses. The openness of the EHEA in terms of diploma mobility is given in Figure 7-2.

Figure 7-2 Openness of the EHEA (diploma mobility)



In many countries the number of students from other EHEA countries has more than doubled. Particularly sharp increases can be found in Croatia (>500%), the Czech Republic (>400%) and Lithuania (>300%). In addition to the smaller countries like Liechtenstein

and Luxembourg, Denmark, Germany, the UK and especially Austria remain countries with a high—and growing—proportion of foreign students from other EHEA countries. Some other important destinations like Belgium, Sweden and Switzerland remain important destinations but their proportion of EHEA students is stagnant. A considerable group—with mainly countries from Eastern and Central Europe—are minor destinations and there are few factors apparent that would lead one to believe that they would become major ones in the near future. Of these, some countries, like Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine have witnessed a decline in their proportion of foreign students.

The overall picture seems to point to a widening of the gap between east and west. Western European countries are still the major recipients of foreign EHEA students. At the same time, emerging countries in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe have witnessed mainly an increase in students coming from their ex-communist neighbours (e.g. Albanian students studying in Greece, and Slovak students in the Czech Republic).

Another confirmation of the east-west movements may be found in comparing incoming and outgoing mobility in the countries of the EHEA, because geographical clusters are evident. The major recipients of foreign EHEA students are Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, the UK and northwest European countries. These are at the same time the low sending countries. Some of these, like Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK even show decreasing numbers of students going to other EHEA countries.

Countries with very high percentages of outgoing students are Albania (24%),¹ Cyprus (99%), Liechtenstein (130%) and Luxembourg (157%) all of which send very high percentages abroad for their education. The other major sending countries are Bulgaria, Georgia, Slovakia and 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. Iceland, Ireland, Malta, and Russia show high outward mobility but also receive a modest number of foreign EHEA students. A mixed group of countries, mainly in Eastern and Southern Europe, have only limited mobility, outgoing as well as incoming.

7.2.3 *Credit mobility and openness in the EHEA*

The openness of the EHEA is not only expressed by students pursuing complete degrees in other countries. A major objective of the EHEA is to provide students with the opportunity to spend part of their study career in another EHEA country to improve their intercultural, international and professional competences and to interact with other European citizens. As we noted before, data on these study abroad experiences are very poor and most of these cross-national movements remain unregistered. We will try to provide at least some indication on the trends and cross-national differences in credit mobility by analyzing two data sources: the Erasmus statistics and the Eurostudent data.

The statistics of Erasmus are obviously limited to the countries that participate in the Erasmus scheme. The growth in Erasmus movements between 1999 and 2007 has been caused almost solely by the new countries. Although the majority of mobility movements in the Erasmus framework still concern students from the group of countries that were involved in Erasmus since the start in 1987, the number of students from countries from

¹ The UNESCO data calculate the percentage of learners studying in other EHEA countries compared to those within their own country; 100% thus indicates as many students abroad as 'at home'.

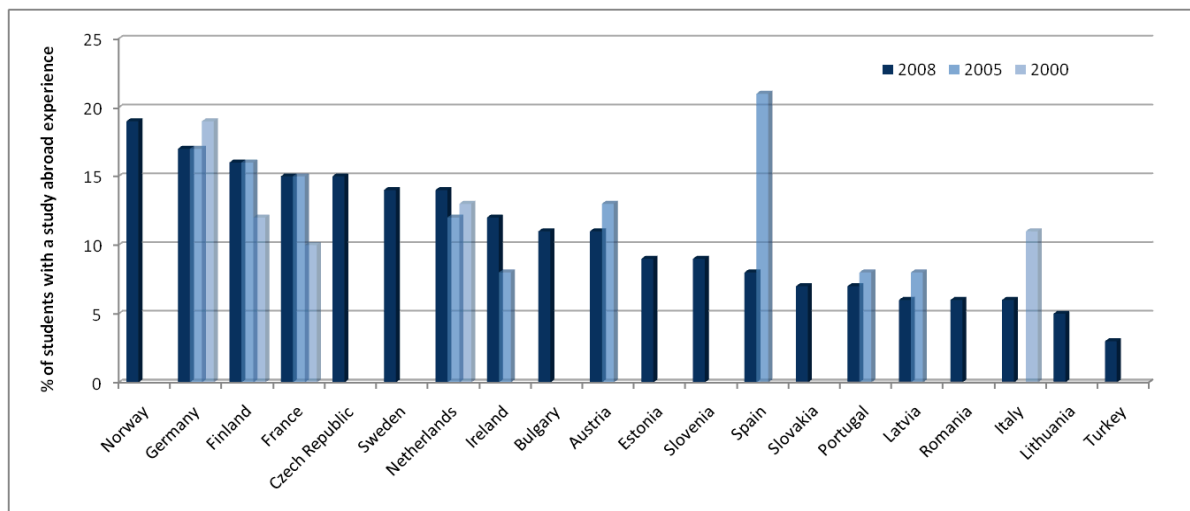
Central and Eastern Europe has grown almost by a factor of four. Teaching staff mobility has more than doubled since the Bologna Declaration was signed.

The general picture is that Bologna measures might have facilitated a further growth of the Erasmus programme. It has done so however, mainly in the countries that joined Erasmus around the time the Bologna Declaration was signed. Therefore the growth can also be perceived as a normal process after joining such a scheme.

In the case of Erasmus mobility it is also possible to detect an east-to-west pattern. Even though the new Erasmus countries provide more than 20% of the students for the Erasmus scheme, this group is the host for less than 10% of Erasmus students. Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey in particular are substantial sending countries. Sweden, Spain and the UK are countries with a high surplus in terms of Erasmus students.

The second source of data on credit mobility is the Eurostudent survey (Figure 7-4). Although this has the potential to be an important source of improvement in the quality of mobility data, the series of surveys that have been conducted thus far still show severe limitations (see the arguments earlier in this chapter). The Eurostudent survey of 2008 has been conducted in 20 countries. Earlier versions used a smaller set of countries and therefore one can assess the change in mobility only for those countries that have been surveyed multiple times. In some cases there is a decline in comparison with earlier years (Austria, Spain and Italy; for the latter the deviations are rather high and are likely to be related to changes in methodologies).

Figure 7-3: Proportion of students with a study abroad experience



Source: Eurostudent surveys 2000, 2005, 2008.

If the 20% objective for outbound mobility is based on the data from this survey, most countries have a long way to go. This is even more the case if we consider that most countries not participating in the survey are likely to have lower participation rates than most of the countries listed here.

7.2.4 *Measures facilitating student and staff mobility*

Bologna and its action lines have contributed to more transparency in the EHEA but this might not always be recognised by students and therefore it has not yet led unequivocally to the desired levels of mobility. For this to take place several measures are still required (as was acknowledged in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve). Additional measures will be necessary on legal issues such as visa regulations, on further improving recognition procedures, and on overcoming financial obstacles to mobility. One of the major instruments through which financial obstacles should be overcome is the further implementation of portable study grants and loans.

The portability of loans and grants has come up multiple times in the Bologna Process. It was brought forward in Berlin in 2003 and in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve it was acknowledged that the full portability of study grants and loans was one of the essential requirements to further stimulate mobility in the EHEA. Full portability of either grants or loans has now been implemented in most of the Bologna countries. Eight countries—Albania, Armenia, Belgium (French Community), Italy, Russia, Serbia, the UK and Ukraine—do not provide opportunities for students to take their loans and/or grants across borders in the EHEA. Some of these countries however do provide grants or loans specifically for going abroad. In the case of Serbia and Russia, they are on a competitive basis and are awarded to talented students. In the case of the French Community of Belgium, and Scotland (UK), they are awarded for specific courses or specific groups.

7.3 **The assessment of mobility**

Main goals stated

- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement (1999) of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff, emphasizing the social dimension of mobility (2001).
- Increasing the international competitiveness of the European systems of higher education. Ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction (1999).
- Portability of national loans and grants (2003).
- Improve the availability of data on mobility (and the social dimension) across all the countries participating in the Bologna Process (2007).

What was the situation ten years ago, before the Bologna Process?

Mobility questions were seen in a national perspective, although through EU programmes such as Erasmus and Tempus some international stimuli had entered into the policy debate. The motivations for countries' interest in mobility questions varied and consisted of different mixes of educational, cultural and economic rationales. Student mobility figures in general rose in the 1980s and 1990s after the introduction of the main EU mobility programmes.

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

- The main change between 1999 and 2007 ¹ has been the shift in focus from short-term credit mobility (by ‘free movers’ and learners moving within the framework of European, national or regional programmes) to degree mobility.
- In terms of degree mobility, developments already apparent before the Bologna process intensified, for instance the mobility of learners from outside of Europe to Europe. The east-to-west pattern of mobility was also apparent before 1999.
- All mobility flows before the Bologna Declaration involved much smaller numbers of learners than in 2007.

Attractiveness of the EHEA in terms of degree mobility

- Students’ degree mobility has continued to increase since the Bologna Declaration. The EHEA has been particularly successful in attracting learners from outside the EHEA. The numbers of learners coming to the EHEA increased by 116% in absolute terms between 1999 and 2007 (compared to a global growth in foreign learners of 60%). In relative terms, the share of non-EHEA foreign learners in EHEA countries has grown by more than 60%, comprising 2.6% of the student population within the EHEA in 2007 (compared to 1.6% in 1999). The increased learner mobility towards the EHEA cannot be fully attributed to the Bologna process. Many countries have intensified their campaigns to recruit learners from outside Europe and developments after 1999 in other major destination countries like the United States (9/11/2001) or Australia may have contributed to the shift towards Europe.
- Many of these new foreign learners opted for the ‘old’ EU countries as their study destinations. Traditional destinations such as the UK, Germany and France have remained strong players. Countries where the numbers of foreign non-EHEA learners have decreased are mainly in the South-eastern part of the EHEA.

Internal degree mobility in the EHEA (full degrees abroad)

- Internal student mobility showed much more modest growth. In absolute numbers the growth is still quite impressive at 38%, but given growing student populations in most countries in relative terms this represents only a 4% growth: in 1999, 1.9% of the total number of EHEA learners were foreign learners from other EHEA countries, while in 2007 this was 2.0%.
- In these mobility movements a clear east-to-west pattern can be detected. The main receivers are in general small senders and vice versa. Most uneven in this respect is the UK, with almost 20% incoming foreign learners but with only 0.5% of its learners studying elsewhere in the EHEA. Fairly balanced mobility involving substantial learner numbers is only found in two countries—Ireland and Malta.

Internal credit mobility in the EHEA (a recognised part of a programme abroad)

- There is a need for better data on credit mobility. Current national data sources are either not sufficient or methodologies and definitions are not compatible with other

¹ The latest relatively comparable data on student mobility are from 2007; this limits our possibilities to address changes that may have taken place in the last few years.

countries' sources. The two sources that are available, Erasmus statistics and Eurostudent surveys, are limited (Erasmus does not include free mobility figures; Eurostudent includes less than half the countries participating in the EHEA), but both indicate a slight growth in the number of credit-mobile learners in the EHEA.

- Erasmus statistics show an increase, although predominantly in outward mobility from Erasmus countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Participation in Erasmus is however smaller than 'free-moving' mobility.
- The data from the Eurostudent Survey (where 'free-movers' are included) shows promises for data improvement in the future, but from the current data points (2000, 2005, 2008) we cannot conclude that there is an upwards or downwards trend. There seems to be a mixed pattern, but these results are probably influenced by changes in methodologies and definitions over the reporting period.

Assessment

Promotion of mobility within the EHEA

- EHEA-wide credit mobility: data of sufficient quality are not available.
- EHEA-wide diploma mobility: absolute rise of 39%, equalling a relative increase of 4%,¹ to the point where 2.0% of EHEA learners were pursuing a degree in another EHEA country.
- Distribution across countries of credit mobility: no comparable data available.
- Distribution across countries of diploma mobility: 29 countries witnessed a growth in foreign learners from other EHEA countries; 11 countries showed decreasing numbers. 6 countries did not have data of sufficient quality.
- There is an east-to-west imbalance in student mobility. This imbalance needs attention for student mobility to remain sustainable.

World-wide attractiveness

- The EHEA attracted less than 25% of the world's foreign learners in 1999 and its share increased to over 30% by 2007. The EHEA's attractiveness is increasing. The goal is apparently being achieved but needs continued attention to ensure satisfactory progress and better balance across the EHEA countries (see also next point).
- Twenty-five countries witnessed a growth in foreign learners from outside the EHEA countries; 15 countries showed decreasing numbers. 6 countries did not have data of sufficient quality.
- Portability of grants and/or loans is possible in 38 out of 46 countries and, although it is spreading, needs further attention.
- Availability of data on mobility: Data on diploma mobility has shown considerable improvement. Data on credit mobility has shown some improvement but not for all

¹ Relative increase takes the growth of the student population into account.

countries of the EHEA. Data on staff mobility (teachers, researchers, administrative staff) remains very poor. This needs further attention.

8 Attractiveness of European higher education and the global dimension of the Bologna Process

In this section we turn our attention to the second strategic goal of the Bologna Declaration, i.e. ‘to promote the European system of higher education world-wide’. This aspect of Bologna is of growing importance—not least in the wider context of globalisation and the EU’s response. However, it is only comparatively recently that it has been the subject of specific attention in its own right. For these reasons, a full assessment will have to wait several years, and hence the approach we have taken in the project has necessarily been more descriptive than for the other action areas.

8.1 Process dynamics and goals

Considerations regarding the relationship between European higher education and the rest of the world had already been visible in the Sorbonne Declaration—and before (Zgaga, 2007). Even from this point there were two elements to thinking with, on the one hand, cooperation and the public good character of higher education (e.g. in the Magna Charta Universitatum, and in the Erasmus and Tempus programmes) and, on the other, the competitiveness angle (e.g. transnational education, stimulating incoming mobility). In the Bologna Declaration, the global dimension appeared as a major strategic goal:

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

For our assessment, the Terms of Reference put this goal succinctly as: ‘to promote the European system of higher education world-wide’.

A major focus on the global dimension had to wait until basic reforms had taken place within the EHEA. An extended working group, established following the Bergen 2005 meeting, reported to the London meeting in 2007, where the ministers adopted the strategy paper, ‘The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting’. It formulated the following operational goals for the global dimension:

- Improving information on the European Higher Education Area,
- Promoting European Higher Education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness,
- Intensifying policy dialogue,
- Strengthening cooperation based on partnership,
- Furthering the recognition of qualifications.

Given that the attractiveness of European higher education is a strategic goal, almost all action areas can be interpreted as means to achieve this, from degree reform and quality assurance cooperation to recognition policies. In order to examine this topic within the scope of the project, however, we took as our major indicator of success the trends in

mobility from outside the EHEA. With regard to the five operational goals, it was not possible to examine these in detail. Instead, we gathered the views of experts from around the world on the effects of the Bologna Process outside the signatory countries. In the following sections we therefore look first at mobility, before turning to a consideration of the views of experts.

8.2 Attraction indicated through mobility

International competitiveness was and is part of countries' economic potential; the EHEA countries in this respect are each others' competitors as much as they are now cooperating to make European higher education collectively more attractive worldwide. In an assessment of this strategic goal, the collective outcomes are more important than the individual countries' positions. As the major finding, we can therefore reiterate what was said regarding student mobility from outside the EHEA (see chapter 7): this has grown at a much faster rate than international mobility did globally and the share of internationally mobile students coming to Europe has risen from less than 25% in 1999 to 30% in 2007. In terms of how this correlates with the Bologna Process, we can see from what was said above that as a separate action area, the global dimension started to emerge in 2005 but took off in 2007. The marked upward trend in mobility thus started before the global dimension was given separate attention. It seems, therefore, that the aura of the Bologna Process and the reforms countries had made until ca. 2005 were effective. However, assessing the effects on mobility of the augmented activity of the Bologna Process on the global dimension since 2007 will be possible only years from now.

The 'taking off' of the global dimension in 2007 took place in a spirit of both competitiveness and cooperation between the EHEA and the rest of the world. Options for implementation were prepared by the working group before the 2007 London meeting and although not officially endorsed, the elements for possible future actions were published as an inspiration for the participating countries, the Bologna Secretariat, the European Commission and other partners. Decisive actions to improve supportive policies to facilitate student and staff mobility (visas, social security coverage, work permits, pensions) are among the EHEA countries' commitments for 2010.

After the ministerial meeting of 2009, the first global Bologna Policy Forum took place, focusing future attention on worldwide recognition of degrees and on fair and fruitful 'brain circulation'. The second Forum will take place at the 2010 ministerial meeting in Vienna.

8.3 Global views on the Bologna Process

Our eight-person International Expert Panel (the composition of which is provided in Appendix 1 to this volume) was asked to describe how European higher education was seen from their part of the world and which elements of the Bologna Process especially were catching attention.

As a preliminary remark, we can note that views of the Bologna Process are positive around the world, but few people outside a small circle of experts in the higher education community and among policy-makers were well aware of the Process (sources: International Expert Panel contributions; interviews USA; Egron-Polak, 2008). Further

information, promotion and policy dialogue remain necessary, as the agenda of this action area already shows.

The elements of the Bologna Process that have attracted attention differ across the world regions.

To begin with, the Bologna reforms as well as the emergence of international university rankings have altered the US perceptions of European higher education. While the international university rankings have reinforced popular views as to the superiority of US higher education, particularly research universities, the rankings have also increased awareness of the growing international competition confronting US higher education (contribution Dill).

Student mobility from Europe to the USA is mainly in the form of undergraduate degree holders seeking entry into postgraduate studies (interviews USA). As in intra-European degree mobility, the final decision to accept students into Master's and doctoral programmes lies with the universities themselves; there is not a uniform policy. Three-year Bachelor's degrees are now more often recognised for access to postgraduate studies in prestigious universities as being equivalent to US four-year Bachelor's than before (contributions¹ Adelman, Dill; interviews) (AACRAO, 2007; IIE, 2009).

European students make up around one out of every eight international students in U.S. higher education. They 'represent 13% of the total international student population in the U.S., including degree, non-degree and intensive English students as well as those on academic training, with over 84,000 students' (IIE, 2009, p. 1). These figures have gone down since 2001: 'The number of students from the European Union studying in the United States has declined by 12% since 2001/02. Students from Germany, the leading sending country from Europe to the U.S., have dropped 7% since 2001/02' (IIE, 2009, p. 13). This probably has more to do with other factors (such as the 9/11 events) than with the Bologna reformed degrees, which are only now beginning to appear on the scene.

The Tuning project has inspired 'Tuning USA': a project to reach more compatibility between study programmes 'under which three state higher education systems (Indiana, Minnesota, and Utah) have formed study groups to examine the European Tuning process (not only its core, but also as it has emerged in the Thematic Networks), try out a few of its procedures (consultative survey, templates for learning outcomes), and decide whether it deserves a more expansive treatment in US contexts'. It has been showcased in influential publications (interviews AACRAO, CHEA, ACE, 2009-06-03/05) as the most directly relevant development of the Bologna Process for American eyes (Adelman, 2008, 2009). Utah also adopted its version of the Diploma Supplement as an information tool (contribution Adelman).

From this practical level of Tuning and DS-like instruments, attention in the USA may turn towards qualifications frameworks—at the level of separate disciplines at first—as the next step towards transparency and assurance regarding learning outcomes (contribution Adelman). Yet, the American higher education system remains less government-directed, with more influence of non-governmental agencies (such as the regional and professional accreditation organisations) and more autonomy for higher education institutions. In such a context, a US-wide and governmentally-backed

¹ 'Contribution' refers to statements by members of the International Expert Panel.

qualifications framework, for instance, is at least a contested option, and it is argued that through a century-long tradition of nation-wide accreditation in the USA, much tacit knowledge has developed incrementally that in some areas tackles some of the problems that more systematic approaches like Europe-wide qualifications frameworks aim to address (interviews USA): professional organisations set standards or expectations, academic networks influence academic programmes, and governmental accountability impacts on indicator systems and the application of standardised tests, etc.

Some U.S. accreditation organisations that wish to operate in Europe, or that have been asked to accredit e.g. business schools or engineering programmes by European higher education institutions (AACSB and ABET,¹ in particular) would benefit from mutual cooperation between the EQAR or ENQA and CHEA² to avoid multiple recognition processes. For them, substantial efficiency gains would arise if their recognition by CHEA could substitute the reviews of quality assessment agencies stipulated in the ESG (interviews USA).

In Latin America, Tuning was also the main element of interest, in the form of an international project among specialists from Latin American and European universities (contribution Mollis; Brunner, 2009); this large project was however not followed up. Transposing European instruments and experiences to another context proved to be difficult.

For China, student mobility to Europe and research cooperation form the core of interest, but the government is also looking at the Bologna Process, including degree structures, in its development of a strategic plan for higher education up to 2020 (contribution Zhang). For that, the widening of participation in higher education to a mass scale (more than 50% of the age cohort) and the role of higher education institutions in innovation are the subjects attracting most attention.

Australia is said to have perceived the Bologna Process as a threat to their market shares of international students. A similar situation might arise for Japan if it would not reform its higher education to remain internationally attractive and stay in tune with the Bologna Process (contribution Hada).

The Asian-Pacific Brisbane communiqué (2006), like the Bologna Process, was a sustained process, covering 52 countries centring on Australia, with a cooperation structure to support follow-up actions. Since 2008, however, no further activities have been reported.

In the Gulf Cooperation Council, there is interest in the establishment of qualifications frameworks; and the ECTS, Erasmus and EQAR are also of interest to higher education in Saudi Arabia (contribution Mazi).

Other recent initiatives for regional integration of higher education were inspired by the first strategic aim of the Bologna Process. Such initiatives, in different states of maturation, are evident in several world regions: the Gulf Cooperation Council, Eastern Asia (Japan – Korea – China), South Asia (contributions Hada, Mazi), the Euro-

¹ AACSB, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, is the leading accreditation organisation for business schools; ABET, Inc., is its parallel for engineering and technology programmes.

² CHEA is the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, an association of US higher education institutions, which recognises accreditation agencies.

Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area, the Lusophone Area of Higher Education, and West-Africa (Egbron-Polak, 2008).

Countries are considering compatibility of their higher education degrees with the 'Bologna Process degrees' when reforming their higher education systems (contributions Zhang, Mazi), which to some extent may be at odds with higher education degrees from the USA, which is the other major higher education area often looked at for compatibility of degree systems.

Cooperation has increased between higher education institutions from EHEA countries with counterparts abroad (which is an operational goal now, too); this is mentioned in the USA (contribution Dill; interviews USA) as well as in Latin American and Asian literature (Brunner, 2009; Wächter, 2006).

Not all aspects of international views can be interpreted as positively as the selection compiled above. Some more critical notes include the following.

International students opt for certain countries rather than for 'the EHEA'. In their choice of higher education institutions and countries, national traditions and institutional reputations play an important role (contributions Zhang, Mazi). Global rankings of higher education institutions have become instruments for establishing or reinforcing institutional reputations (contribution Zhang), (van Vught, 2009).

Associated with the previous point: Chinese students still prefer to go to prestigious universities in the USA; they regard European countries as a second-best option (contribution Zhang). While this statement is not based on extensive research, it may give reason to think about the 'market profile' of the EHEA and the European countries in other parts of the world.

Students who have earned a three-year undergraduate degree in Europe may experience difficulties getting their degree recognised in many countries where a four-year Bachelor's is the norm; e.g. there are issues with professional recognition of medical and engineering degrees in Saudi Arabia (contribution Mazi). Although the issue of defining degrees through descriptors based on learning outcomes rather than by a crude year count has been cleared in, for example, the USA (interviews USA), this appears not to be the case globally.

European degrees are not yet regarded as representing a uniform level within recognition practice in the USA. The admission of students into graduate schools depends much more on experiences and trust on a university-by-university basis (interviews USA). However, US graduate schools increasingly rely on 'evaluation of coursework and preparation to undertake graduate study rather than sole reliance on the length of the degree' (IIE, 2009, pp. 4, 8). In that sense, the Bologna Process is changing recognition practices, and this change has worldwide relevance, because US admission officers begin to apply the same principles to other (three-year) undergraduate degrees as well, e.g. those from India (IIE, 2009, pp. 11-12).

Other world regions are selective in taking up the Bologna Process as an example for their own reforms, focusing on what seems applicable in their region and de-emphasising what does not seem applicable (see the example of Tuning in North as well as South America). This may lead to distorted views among other stakeholders in those regions of what is involved in the entire Bologna Process. Moreover, 'policy borrowing' of separate elements

may ignore the interdependence between policy elements and therefore lead to unexpected results. For instance, as shown in the previous chapters, degree reform, curriculum reform, qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition are strongly intertwined in the Bologna Process; introducing three degree cycles without the other elements would not make a country's higher education 'Bologna-compatible'. In Latin America, one of the main things from the Bologna Process that resounded well with previous Mercosur initiatives was the 'joint construction of a space for dialogue on higher education, focusing on quality and seeking specific and accessible solutions to shared problems' (contribution Mollis); this is an example of good policy borrowing: adapting an idea or goal to existing interests, rather than copying instruments.

In sum, the Bologna Process as such has become been the source of inspiration for many developments in higher education cooperation policies around the world (as argued also in: Egron-Polak, 2008). That is an unexpected, positive side effect of a unique European cooperation process in higher education.

8.4 Conclusions and assessment

As an action line, the global dimension started to emerge in 2005 and took off in 2007, in a spirit of 'both competitiveness and cooperation'. After the ministerial meeting of 2009, the first global Bologna Policy Forum took place, focusing future attention amongst other things on worldwide recognition of degrees and on fair and fruitful 'brain circulation'. Mobility figures apart, it is too early to give an assessment like in the other action areas of this report, so we remain more descriptive here.

The global dimension has two main facets in the Bologna Process. One is the attractiveness of European higher education for the rest of the world as indicated in worldwide student mobility. We showed earlier that incoming mobility from outside the EHEA is growing faster than international mobility worldwide; Europe's higher education is indeed becoming more attractive. This result is mainly associated with the cumulative effect of national policies as until 2007, our final year of mobility data, there were hardly any specific actions in the Bologna Process directed at the global dimension. This is now changing and decisive actions to improve supportive policies to facilitate student and staff mobility (visas, social security coverage, work permits, pensions) are among the EHEA countries' commitments for 2010 and beyond.

Another facet of the global dimension may be an unexpected side effect: the Bologna Process has become an inspiration for the development of higher education cooperation policies all around the world. This side effect triggered the development of global policy forums.

An international expert panel identified elements that have been adapted or adopted across the world regions that they hailed from (Africa, Arabia, Australia, East Asia, Latin America and North America):

- In the USA, interest in the Bologna Process concerns mostly student mobility from Europe to US postgraduate studies (three-year bachelors are now more often recognised than before) and the Tuning project, which has inspired 'Tuning USA'. From the focus on Tuning one can conclude that there seems to be some hesitation in the USA to use 'abstract' instruments such as QF-EHEA, while approaches such as Tuning give a central role to academics and the professions.

- In China, student mobility to Europe and research cooperation form the core of interest, but the government is also looking at the Bologna Process including degree structures in its development of a strategic plan for higher education until 2020.
- In Latin America, Tuning also was the main element of interest, in the form of an international project among specialists from eight Latin American and seven European universities; the project was however not followed up.
- The Asian-Pacific Brisbane communiqué (2006), like the Bologna Process, was a sustained process at least until 2008, covering 52 countries, with a cooperation structure to support follow-up actions.
- Other recent initiatives for regional integration of higher education are evident in several world regions, e.g. Southern Africa, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Eastern Asia (Japan – Korea – China) and South Asia.
- The effects of the Bologna Process include increased cooperation between higher education institutions from EHEA countries with counterparts abroad; this is mentioned in the USA, Latin America and Asia.

More critical points about the Bologna Process from other countries' perspectives included:

- Learners do not seem to take a country's membership of the EHEA into consideration when choosing a destination for international mobility; they look at individual countries and institutions. Equally the EHEA is not seen as an area providing a uniform level of higher education degrees.
- The USA remains the most prestigious destination, attracting the top tier of learners (e.g. from China).
- Further information provision remains necessary to give a complete picture of the coherence of the reforms in the Bologna Process to stakeholders in other parts of the world.

9 Cases of across-the-board high performance

9.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have made an assessment of the impact of the Bologna Process on a range of areas, looking at trends across the countries involved and drawing on material from sets of country case studies selected to provide insights into those specific areas. In this chapter the report seeks to take a more holistic approach by looking at what individual countries can tell us about a range of Bologna-related policies and practice as they have been worked out ‘on the ground’. In order to do this, it focuses on six case studies of countries that show a high level of performance across the board, or, more specifically, countries that either show high performance on goals (Ireland and the Netherlands) or a good level of application of means (Estonia, Georgia, Turkey and Serbia). Within the latter group, one country has been involved in the Bologna Process from the beginning (Estonia) and three are ‘late-comers’. The full case studies can be found in Volume 3 of our report. In looking at countries such as these, our aims were to identify both critical success factors and reasons for lack of progress in the implementation of Bologna-inspired policy and practice, and to generate lessons of good practice that other countries might learn for the future.

The indicators for choosing the cases covered four areas: degree structure, quality assurance, mobility and the social dimension. The indicators used within each of these areas are shown in Table 9-1. The scores we used on these indicators were *relative* to those of other countries: we wanted to find countries in the top group of all countries in the Bologna Process so as to find good practices that others might adapt for their own use.

Table 9-1 Indicators used to select ‘high performing’ countries

| |
|--|
| Degree structure |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of students in the 2/3 cycle structure • Degree programmes described in terms of the European Credit Transfer & Accumulation System (ECTS) • Flexible teaching modes and/or modularisation • Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplements (DS) |
| Quality assurance |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage of development of national external quality assurance systems • Stage of implementation of National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) • Level of international cooperation |
| Mobility |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in non-EHEA students 1999-2006 • Increase in incoming intra-European mobility 1999-2006 • Increase in outgoing intra-European mobility • Stage of implementation of Lisbon Recognition Convention |
| The social dimension |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation levels, recognition of prior learning • Availability of student services • Financial support for students • Existence of flexible learning paths |

For Ireland and the Netherlands, with high performance on goals, the questions were: what did these countries do by way of policies, how did they involve higher education institutions and stakeholders, and what were the relevant conditional factors—if any—that contributed to their level of ‘success’? For the other four countries the questions were: how are the different means correlated in policy and empirically, and how have these helped to achieve the operational, intermediate and finally strategic goals of the Bologna Process, or what prevents their achievement? In this context, the latter case studies looked for factors enabling or hindering policy developments towards operational goals of the Bologna Process.

The Netherlands, Ireland, and Estonia were among the signatory countries present in Bologna (1999). Turkey joined in 2001 (Prague), Serbia in 2003 (Berlin), and Georgia in 2005 (Bergen). There is much diversity among the cases in terms of the size of their systems, the variety of types of higher education institutions within them, the public-private balance, and the level of autonomy of the institutions. This diversity is also reflected in how and to what extent main stakeholders were involved in the domestic processes, key actors being ministries, specific agencies (in the areas of e.g. mobility, quality assurance), ‘buffer’ organisations representing (types of) higher education institutions, and students unions. The overall diversity implied different points of departure for engagement with the Bologna Process, e.g. system readiness for change; nature of domestic higher education policy issues; stakeholders’ positions.

9.2 Why join the Bologna Process?

In terms of countries’ initial decisions to engage with the Bologna Process, two general trends could be detected. First, in a number of countries reform projects were already underway or in preparation (see also chapter 9) and these were perceived to fit well with the Bologna Process. In Ireland, for example, the reform process concerned setting up a qualifications framework (Qualifications Act, 1999), the subsequent launch of the National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI), and the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework in 2003. Developing a system of quality assurance was a related reform project. Another example of this type of trend is found in the Netherlands, where there was a broad consensus to work towards an open and flexible higher education system (also in light of lifelong learning) and to increase internationalisation. In both countries it was not too difficult to balance national needs and perspectives with the Bologna Process developments.

The second trend denotes a general wish to join the European integration process. In Serbia, the main reason to join was to reform the system. The implementation of the Bologna Process principles was seen as an integral part of the European integration agenda of the country, which suffered from political and economic isolation in the 1990s. In Georgia a wish for reform—in light of significant problems of corruption and nepotism in the system, and general inefficiencies—was evident but reform had not yet been set in motion at the time of joining Bologna. The reform challenge was accompanied by the idea that joining the Bologna Process might help Georgia to integrate with Europe. Estonia and Turkey were at the crossroads of these two trends: in Estonia a reform programme had already made some progress since the end of the 1980s, but there were clear signals voiced in the system that joining the Bologna Process would bring Estonia and its higher education system ‘closer’ to Europe. Reforms were also taking place in Turkey and the Bologna Process was seen as having the potential to strengthen them, for it would allow

Turkish higher education to modernise and internationalise, as well as contributing to an increase in the reputation of Turkish universities.

9.3 Before and after Bologna

9.3.1 Degree structure

Four systems already had a two/three-cycle structure in place. Turkey, for instance, had three cycles (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate) in almost all disciplines, with the exception of health and health-related professions. Each cycle gave access to the next; there were entrance examinations for each cycle. In Serbia there were 4-5 year first degrees and 2-year Master's degrees. Georgia had implemented a two-cycle structure in 1992. And also Ireland, of old, had the three cycles in place. The Netherlands and Estonia had undivided structures, with degrees leading to the Master's level in 4-6 years.

In Ireland, an NQF was deemed key to further implementation of other Bologna action lines: stakeholders agreed that the main aim was to 'tidy up' the system. Although the framework is now in place, differences exist between institutions in terms of establishing a full modular structure with specified learning outcomes. A large majority of institutions is issuing Diploma Supplements.

In Turkey, the legislative changes have focused on ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, the three-cycle model already being in place. ECTS is currently used alongside the existing credit system, based on the US tradition (credits based on teaching hours). The Diploma Supplement can be requested in English, German or French; the first copy is free of charge. A draft National Qualifications Framework has been prepared in consultation with key stakeholders, pilot implementation will start in 2010.

In Serbia, new legislation was adopted in 2005. The previous first-cycle programmes were reorganised into 3+2 or 4+1 year programmes. In the 2005 regulations, the non-university sector became part of the higher education system. Change went beyond degree structure reform: there were also changes in the system of studies. One-semester courses were introduced as well as continuous assessment of students (instead of single exams after 3-5 semesters). The 2005 law also introduced the Diploma Supplement (automatically issued in Serbian and a widely spoken European language) and ECTS (although largely as an instrument to award credits).

In Georgia, the 2004 Law on higher education introduced three cycles. Fourteen higher education institutions (about 25%) currently still have the 'old' system, but it is expected that they will have reformed their degrees by 2010. The Law also stipulates the introduction of modular programmes and tools for the (international) recognition of degrees (Diploma Supplement). ECTS was introduced in 2005-06 and made an obligatory part of receiving institutional accreditation, but is not yet measured in terms of learning outcomes. The Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge in Georgian and English. The 2004 Law was later amended to introduce a Higher Education Qualification Framework.

In Estonia, the 3+2 structure and Diploma Supplement were introduced in 2002-03. Some disciplines are exempted from the three-cycle structure. The Master's degree can also be awarded in higher professional education, if set requirements are met.

In the Netherlands new regulations were approved in 2002, relating to the degree structure and accreditation. By 2007, the degree structure had also been implemented in professional areas like medicine, dentistry, etc. ECTS has replaced the previous national credit system. Most of the new Master's degrees are offered entirely in English.

Most of the countries in this chapter moved rather easily towards the three-cycle structure, because the main ingredients of such a structure were already in place; national regulations could be put in place rather swiftly. At the same time, we see a fair number of exceptions to full implementation: some institutions have not yet implemented the degree changes (Georgia), NQFs are not yet in place (Turkey), credit systems are not yet in line with the ECTS (Turkey), and courses are not always defined in terms of learning outcomes (Ireland, Georgia).

9.3.2 *Quality assurance*

Quality assurance mechanisms date back to the pre-Bologna era in most higher education systems, Georgia and Serbia being the exceptions. In Turkey, the Council of Higher Education and Inter-university Board were responsible for quality assurance, but the case study shows that this had not led to actually implementing a nationwide quality assurance system. In Ireland, developments regarding quality assurance preceded Bologna: the 1999 Qualifications Act prescribed degree award procedures, qualification validation and other quality assurance issues, but quality assurance in the university sector was 'light touch'. In the Netherlands a quality assurance system was launched in the late 1980s, aimed at both assessment and improvement at the programme level. In Estonia, a system of quality assurance was in place, based on programme and institutional accreditation. Accreditation since 1995 had been in the hands of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council.

In Turkey, the Commission for Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in Higher Education (YODEK) was installed in 2005. Quality assurance consists of internal quality assurance and external quality assurance is recommended. For external quality assurance, the higher education institutions can choose an evaluating organisation certified by YODEK. There is currently not yet a system-wide accreditation system, but in some disciplines (e.g. engineering) there are promising and successful developments.

In Ireland, the Irish University Quality Board (2002) was established to promote quality assurance and inter-university cooperation. HETAC (2002), responsible for the non-university sector, produced guidelines for internal and external review. The establishment of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN, 2003) was considered crucial, as a platform for key bodies in quality assurance to work on principles, approaches and procedures.

The Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) is responsible for programme accreditation of existing programmes and licensing of new programmes offered by public as well as private higher education providers in the Netherlands (and the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium) since 2003. The NVAO is internationally very active, e.g. in European networks like the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The first round of accreditation of all programmes is likely to be finalised in 2010.

In Estonia, documents and interviews confirmed that the national quality assurance system was largely in line with Bologna expectations. Currently, about half of the institutions have regular internal quality assurance and all institutions have undergone external quality review at least once. A review of the national agency against Part 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines is planned. In 2009, a new independent agency (the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency, EKKA) started working, making institutional accreditation compulsory.

In Georgia, quality assurance was deemed the most important element of the Bologna reform process. Institutional accreditation (introduced by the 2004 Law) has led to a decrease in the number of institutions formally entitled to provide higher education (from 290 to 52). Evaluation at programme level is currently in preparation, and accreditation at this level will start in 2011. The new regulations have made the National Education Accreditation Centre (NEAC, established in 2006) responsible for defining equivalence and authenticity of educational credentials.

In Serbia, an accreditation scheme was implemented following the introduction of new national regulations (2005). The Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assessment (CAQA) was set up, in charge of proposing standards for accreditation and internal quality assurance, to conduct accreditation processes, to advise on the approval of higher education institutions, and to help institutions in the process of quality improvement.

These case studies demonstrate that systems that already had a QA process of some sort in place could adapt their mechanisms to the expectations of the Bologna Process. Those that did not yet have a mature system in place, do have the quality assurance/assessment agencies in place, but the required procedures have not yet always been fully implemented at all institutions and/or within all programmes.

9.3.3 *Mobility*

Regarding mobility and in addition to what was said about that subject in chapter 7, it is important to note that Turkey, Estonia, Georgia and Serbia were not part of Erasmus pre-Bologna (and Serbia and Georgia are still not partners in the Erasmus mobility programme). Of course, there was international mobility of staff and students, but this was organised through bilateral agreements, or organised within Tempus and related programmes.

In Turkey (2003-04), there was a pilot regarding participation in the Erasmus programme. In a fair number of institutions, international offices have been established, and the number of courses in English is on the increase. Despite this, the percentage of incoming students has fallen as well as the number of outgoing students. The lack of funds for students and students' lack of foreign language skills are seen as the two most important factors inhibiting student mobility.

In the case of Georgia, the limited data available seem to indicate that mobility is marginal. The lack of financial resources for students is a main inhibitor. To improve mobility, the Georgian government launched a graduate student support scheme in 2005.

Although there seems to be a fair number of Serbian students studying outside Serbia, it is unclear whether they are free movers or actually second-generation Serbian émigrés in

other European countries. There seem to be as yet very few specific national policy measures to promote mobility. Loans and grants are not portable.

Estonia joined Erasmus in 1999. The key role ascribed to the Estonian language in terms of national heritage, and the small number of programmes offered in other foreign languages, including English, has led to recognising that supplementary support is needed for students wanting to go abroad. There is certainly interest in internationalisation, but this has not (yet) been matched by much actual mobility. The limited data available indicate an increase in incoming students and the case study reports progress regarding recognition of periods of study abroad. Estonian student grants are not portable.

In Ireland, it was expected that the introduction of the NQF would, *inter alia*, encourage mobility through credit-based awards; there has been an increase in mobility, but less than expected. ECTS implementation varies between institutions, and this is also the case for Diploma Supplements (75% of institutions in 2008). The lack of foreign language skills and costs are seen as main inhibitors for outgoing mobility.

In the Netherlands, the change to the three-cycle structure has a positive impact on university mobility, including national mobility. About 5% of graduates leave university after the Bachelor's degree stage: about 80% stay for a Master's at the same university; and 5% take up a Master's at another Dutch university. There has been an increase in outward mobility, but it is still below the EU average.

Looking across all the case studies, it seems that there has not been significant progress in the area of mobility, which for some countries can be explained by a lack of involvement in the Erasmus programme. Lack of financial support seems to play a key role in many countries.

9.3.4 Social dimension

In Ireland, equality of access was already high on the national policy agenda at the time of joining Bologna, and a range of structures and initiatives were in place to support this aim. In the Netherlands, the principle of open access to higher education was in force. There were also policies in place to increase the participation of under-represented social groups in higher education (e.g. ethnic minorities). In Turkey, entrance to higher education is merit-based: high school grades and entrance exam results determine access. Students from lower social economic status were and continue to be under-represented; and it seems there are no policies in place to tackle this. From the Georgian case, it became clear that corruption was and maybe still is one of the main obstacles for equal access to higher education. In Serbia, inequalities did not figure significantly on the political agenda until joining the Bologna Process. From the Estonian case study, for lack of data we did not get a clear insight into the state of affairs regarding equity and equality in higher education in the pre-Bologna period.

In Turkey, there are concerns about a trade-off between increased access and a drop in quality. Government access policies are not explicitly geared towards increasing student diversity. Trying to cope with high student demand, higher education institutions apply entrance examinations and students try to improve their chances by taking preparatory courses. This part of the access system is somewhat discriminatory: those who are financially well-off can afford costly preparatory courses (there also is some quota for poor

but excellent students). There is not yet a system of recognition of prior learning. The financial support system is based on merit and need. Loans are repayable two years after graduation. Data indicate that the main support for students comes from their families.

In Georgia, a new national examination system (2005) implies that exam results determine entrance to higher education and the level of financial support. There is a general feeling in the system that—because of the focus on merit—the social dimension has received least attention in the Bologna Process. There is now a national strategy focusing on the social dimension (better opportunities for ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged students) and a grant system was introduced in 2005.

In Ireland, a National Office for Equity of Access was established in 2003, to support institutions to enhance equity of access. The office facilitates educational access and opportunities for groups that are under-represented in higher education.

The Dutch higher education system has a high level of accessibility. But there is still room for improvement, e.g. for students from lower income groups and from ethnic backgrounds. The launch of associate degrees (two year programmes) in the higher professional education sector is seen as a measure to increase equality. There is also a policy of targeted funding to increase participation from ethnic minority students. Recognition of prior learning is not (yet) regulated centrally, but left to individual institutions.

In Estonia, attention to the social dimension is underdeveloped. There is attention to equity in policy documents, but little has materialised. Many students do not get sufficient funds from government and have to work additionally to their studies.

Overall, it appears that the progress achieved in the area of the social dimension has not been impressive. New policies have been developed, but the issue remains a problem. An adherence to merit-based traditions in four of the case studies limits the effect of policies aimed at equality and equity.

9.4 Stakeholder involvement

In the countries considered here, the process of implementation of Bologna reforms mainly seems to be a mixture of top-down and bottom-up implementation, but with considerable stakeholder involvement. For example, in Ireland many stakeholders were involved in the consultative and collaborative reviews that preceded the Bologna Process. This has arguably led to a high level of acceptance of, for example, NQF and QA procedures. In addition, in the Netherlands, Bologna proposals were debated at a number of national conferences with major stakeholders. A general 'readiness' for change emerged and an agreement that implementation processes should be monitored closely. Similar processes can be found in Estonia, Serbia and Georgia. Stakeholder involvement in early stages led to adapting Bologna reforms to national stakeholders' needs and therefore to some diversity of implementation. In contrast, in Turkey the process can be described as mainly top-down. The Bologna Experts team has played a considerable role in translating regulations into practice, but this means communicating decisions taken to those who must implement them. This approach may stay closer to policy intentions from Bologna-level and national actors, but may encounter more problems achieving buy-in of stakeholders. Recently, the Turkish Bologna Coordination Commission (2008) has been set up, asking each higher education institution to organise a commission to coordinate

and assess implementation. There is also a ‘training the trainers’ programme to support the work of Bologna experts. These developments may inaugurate a more stakeholder-oriented approach also in our sixth case of high-level implementation across action areas.

The majority of our case studies show that the involvement of important stakeholders—in both policy preparation and implementation—is key to a sound realisation of national reform agendas. The Bologna Process seems to have helped give stakeholder consultation a more prominent place at the national level in some countries. According to some interviewees, the structure of the BFUG at the European level was reflected in some of countries (e.g. Austria, Germany), while in some others national follow-up groups with stakeholder involvement were absent as supports for implementation processes (e.g. Serbia, Turkey until recently).

9.5 Factors for success and failure

The Turkish case study shows that a top-down structure was helpful for the realisation of legislation, but not for achieving goals that need stakeholder ‘buy-in’. Generally, there is more understanding of the process among institutional leaders than among academics, administrators and students. Involvement in Bologna has had a positive impact on the outlook towards integration with Europe, with the promise of increased mobility and higher quality within and better development of the system. But there is much reluctance among academic staff and there are concerns about the lack of financial support for change.

In Georgia, the consultation of main stakeholders was deemed a strength of the process. Implementation was driven by strong political commitment of government and stakeholders. A good relationship between the ministry and institutions was important. But there was a lack of (academic) expertise within institutions to support or implement changes.

The process in Ireland included consultations with all key stakeholders both in development and implementation. There was also a good communication infrastructure, with links between national and institutional levels. There was also mention of the small country advantage: a cohesive network of relevant people who know each other, which makes it easier to communicate and disseminate.

In the Netherlands, the additional workload entailed in Bologna was seen as a hurdle for implementation. Another hurdle was the implementation of a Bachelor-Master structure in a binary system, a concern being that the emergence of university Bachelor’s programmes might create unfair competition with higher professional education Bachelor’s. Communication and discussion events helped to prepare the system for implementation and to reach consensus. Some financial support was available for implementation, and monitoring helped to ensure smooth implementation (and to signal emerging problems). Importantly, a number of influential reports of the 1990s had already created a breeding ground for systematic change.

In Estonia, respondents revealed that the current economic crisis put a hold on much of the change process, leaving little room for innovation. A further hurdle is the challenge of adapting to a large number of educational reforms simultaneously. Increasing workloads and a lack of human resources to carry out the reform initiatives were also mentioned as inhibiting factors. Positive factors included: the involvement of all stakeholders in the

early stages of policy and planning; and the financial stimulation available through the European Social Fund.

Overall, the case studies demonstrate that legislation, financial support and proper communication and consultation procedures are important instruments to realise the Bologna objectives. Important hurdles in the implementation process have included: a lack of financial and human resources (including expertise), a too optimistic/overloaded reform agenda, and a lack of support from academics. In almost all countries we found system-specific characteristics that to some extent inhibited the reform project.

In terms of outlook, national reforms have obviously not been finalised. Meeting the Bologna and national objectives is a matter of long-term change and continuously monitoring and reformulating policies. In all six countries the national reform agendas are increasingly attuned to the Bologna Process priorities in order to align national higher education systems within the EHEA.

9.6 The assessment of ‘across-the-board high performance’ cases

A detailed assessment of these high performance cases is seriously limited by the characteristics of the Bologna Process as a dynamic, international process and by the complexity and ambiguity of the relationships between means, goals and ends in the different countries. Furthermore there are limitations to the information available on core indicators. The choice of cases was made in coordination with the European Commission and our study’s Advisory Board; the main target was to select cases that could provide good practices for others to use as benchmarks either as ‘high achievers’ (Ireland, the Netherlands) or as countries that showed high levels of activity compared with others in similar circumstances (among the original signatories: Norway). A secondary argument was the spread of cases across the EHEA; we included countries that showed high levels of activity compared with other ‘late-joiners’ (Georgia, Serbia, Turkey).

What was the situation ten years ago, before the Bologna Process?

- The general contexts for reform in the six countries were defined individually and were quite diverse. Among the cases were post-socialist countries coping with challenges of political-economic change as well as politically and economically relatively stable Western European countries.
- More specifically, focusing on higher education policy a wide variety of steering approaches, policy agendas, policy styles and policy instruments was found.
- Most importantly, the systems had to deal with quite different challenges in their higher education systems, ranging from inefficiencies of all sorts, e.g. high drop-out rates (Serbia), corruption (Georgia), low participation rates across a variety of dimensions, the need for a robust quality assurance system (Ireland), to limited flexibility in the system (the Netherlands), and maintaining and upgrading quality in a rapidly expanding higher education system (Turkey). Consequently, systems had to deal with very different key challenges.
- Despite this variety, the common denominator was that most national policies in higher education targeted domestic issues. In most cases, specific issues were dealt

with in a relatively short timeframe (apart from legislative changes), and not as a decade-long reform.

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

- The Bologna Process has created a common focus in domestic higher education policies. In all six higher education systems we see a general sense of urgency for reform, with the initial concrete ideas for reform being in line or at least compatible with the Bologna action lines.
- The need to tackle domestic issues and the pressure to live up to Bologna objectives proved to be an important stimulus for reform.
- The urgency with which reforms were pursued does not imply that all stakeholders happily agreed with the policies and solutions suggested (note also the current protests against higher education policies—Bologna-related or not—in a number of EHEA countries). Noteworthy are concerns from learners and academic staff.
- The Bologna Process was seen as a lever, key driver or as ‘just’ one of the factors pushing for reform. The implementation of national reforms in practice therefore often implied deviations from Bologna intentions. The Bologna Process has also changed its objectives over time, as have domestic higher education policies.
- This trend of divergence has been strengthened by the fact that elements of the Bologna reform agenda were interpreted differently by different countries and by key domestic higher education stakeholders.
- Related to this, all cases, despite being examples of overall high performance, struggled with the implementation of at least one of the Bologna elements: there is no case of high performance across all indicators/elements. In this respect, we can speak of uneven implementation of the objectives.
- In most countries, the structural elements are in place (three-cycle systems, DS, ECTS), but softer elements (European dimension, social dimension) are less developed.
- Moreover, even regarding the structural elements we see considerable diversity (the way systems deal with ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, etc.). Diversity is not at odds with the international and open character of the Bologna Process, yet can make compatibility across the EHEA difficult (for example, in practice the length of cycles is still measured in terms of years of study rather than by assessing achieved learning outcomes).
- Taking these elements together, we conclude that much reform has taken place, but at different speeds, with different policy emphases, and with different and changing policies and policy instruments across the six cases.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful?

- positive impact on goal achievement. This is particularly evident in the countries where stakeholders were involved in exploring problems and solutions and in setting directions for strategies and policies.

- Strong links between national policy entrepreneurs and bodies and the diverse European-level actors have had a positive impact on implementation (this is particularly noteworthy in the case of quality assurance).
- Cases where higher education systems were already in line with a number of elements of the Bologna ‘model’ struggled less than the others to reach Bologna objectives. They were able to focus more swiftly on in-depth implementation issues.
- Supporting policy mechanisms (funding, regulation, policies in other areas, communication and information exchange)—and a balanced mixture of these mechanisms—are crucial to the successful implementation of Bologna reforms.
- Policy monitoring is an effective instrument to foster goal achievement, allowing for a reflection on policy aims and—if needed—the adjustment of policies.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be less successful?

- The operation of the intergovernmental process (*Stocktaking* and its underlying national reports) has emphasised policy initiatives and plans. The crucial question of the outcomes of the process in terms of its key objectives (employability, compatibility, comparability) has not been addressed by this process (and perhaps could not have been).
- Even in high-performing countries, not all of the objectives have been addressed. In particular, the social dimension has been neglected in terms of concrete policies and actions. This hints at the ambitious nature of the Bologna Process in wishing to achieve many reforms in a relatively limited amount of time; spreading attention thinly across a wide portfolio of complex and interrelated policy issues did not characterise the policy process in high-performing countries.
- In addition, in all cases we noted particular political/cultural issues at stake that complicated the realisation of some of the elements of the Bologna Process (e.g. lack of experience with a quality culture).
- Not all countries, but certainly countries relatively new to the Bologna Process, mentioned a lack of resources and expertise to guide and influence the domestic policy process and subsequent implementation as significant constraining factors.

10 Process dynamics and management

10.1 Introduction

This part of the Bologna Process assessment examines process dynamics and management at the European level. In this context the assessment becomes especially complicated because it involves interplay between different levels of decision making and different levels of responsibilities within the Bologna Process. The division of tasks within the Bologna Process is rather complex: while the strategic goals of the European Higher Education Area are set by the ministers responsible for higher education at biannual conferences, the operationalisation and monitoring of these goals is the responsibility of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) at the European level. This group is assisted and coordinated by the BFUG Board and Secretariat. Our assessment addresses only the European level (mainly the BFUG) and does not assess the management and dynamics of implementation of the Bologna Process goals and means in different national contexts, although the implementation of the operational goals in policies and regulations is the task of the individual countries, their relevant authorities, as well as (semi-)independent national agencies such as quality assessment agencies and the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) or National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs). The situation becomes even more complex, because the actual implementation of national regulations of the Bologna Process action areas and means at the level of study programmes and other student experiences lies in the hands of higher education institutions, which enjoy different degrees of autonomy in their decision making, depending on national regulations and traditions.

Our attempt to answer this assessment challenge in this chapter is organised into three main parts, each focussing on different dimension of the process:

- Management of the Bologna Process at the European level through the BFUG, its working groups and the Secretariat.
- Internal and external perception of the Bologna Process.
- Key challenges.

We shall conclude this chapter with an overall assessment, as in previous chapters.

The chapter is based on interviews conducted in 2009 with national representatives in the Bologna Follow-Up Group and with representatives of organisations that are consultative members in the follow-up structures. The criterion for the selection of the national representatives who were interviewed was their long experience in representing their countries in the Bologna follow-up structures (included in the list of interviewees, Appendix 3 in Volume 2). In addition, information was gathered from the case studies and from interviews with persons previously involved in the BFUG. These sources provided the basis for the assessment of Bologna Process management at the European level and for the internal perception of the Bologna Process. A sketch of external perceptions of the Process was based on an analysis of articles in major European newspapers as well as some key academic publications.

10.2 Management of the Bologna Process at the European level

Initially the Bologna Declaration was mostly an intergovernmental (ministerial) initiative with some influence of the CRE (the European Rectors' Conference, one of two predecessor organisations of the EUA, the European University Association) and the European Commission. Initially the process was open only to the countries participating in the Socrates programme and did not have significant involvement from other stakeholders, as is evident from the list of signatories of the Bologna Declaration.

10.2.1 Structure

The process management structure has evolved significantly over the years and now involves:

- **The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG)**, which gathers together representatives of all member countries, the European Commission and consultative members: the EUA, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the Council of Europe, the UNESCO Centre Européen pour l'enseignement supérieur (UNESCO/CEPES), Education International (EI) and Business Europe. This group is the mandated decision-making body between biannual ministerial conferences, meets at least twice a year, prepares the next ministerial summit, adopts the Bologna Process work plan, elects the BFUG Board, creates official working groups, adopts the terms of reference for the working groups and the Secretariat, organises official Bologna seminars, discusses major initiatives etc.
- **The Board of the BFUG**, which consists of the representatives of the country hosting the next ministerial summit, so called EU 'Troika' representatives, representatives of three elected countries and representatives of some consultative members (EUA, EURASHE, ESU and the Council of Europe). This group prepares the meetings of the BFUG and discusses the documents before they are discussed at the BFUG meetings.
- **The Bologna Secretariat** is hosted and financed by the country hosting the next ministerial summit. The terms of reference and the mandate of the Secretariat are adopted by the BFUG. The Secretariat provides administrative and operational support to the BFUG and its Board, maintains the Bologna Secretariat web-sites and archives, acts as an external and internal contact point for the Process and provides representation at external events.

10.2.2 Assessment criteria

The criteria to assess the current management of the Bologna Process derive from the official Bologna Process documents which state that follow-up structures should:

- Organize 'constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs' (1999).
- Pursue ways of 'intergovernmental cooperation' in collaboration with higher education institutions and associations which should be involved as equal partners (1999, 2001).

Elaborating these official goals in order to assess the management of the process, we specified them into more specific assessment criteria, which have been defined as follows:

- The division of tasks between the BFUG, BFUG Board and Bologna Secretariat should be clearly defined, avoiding duplication of tasks.
- The process should be transparent and open to individual country initiatives regardless of their size and political importance.
- It should involve stakeholder representatives as partners.
- Coordination should ensure a good internal and external flow of information about the process developments.
- Administrative support provided by the Bologna Secretariat should be professional and politically independent.

10.3 Perceptions of the Bologna Process

10.3.1 *Internal perceptions*

Interviews with national representatives who have long experience in the Bologna follow-up structures as well as representatives of stakeholder organisations participating in the BFUG resulted in various views on the process and identified a variety of main achievements, strengths and weaknesses.

10.3.1.1 *An intergovernmental and open political platform*

The management process is in general assessed as open to new themes. Many interviewees even indicated that the process might be too open and that the focus should turn to implementation of the already identified topics. In general, the scope of the topics under consideration has developed from technical and structural issues (transparency instruments, degree structure) to overarching issues (social dimension and mobility goals). The vast majority of interviewees see the Bologna Process as a forum where all countries can bring in their own initiatives and discuss matters freely. It can be argued that the openness to new themes and Bologna's intergovernmental nature has made the process attractive to political entrepreneurs from national ministries or from other international organisations, who tend to include certain political issues in the Bologna Process agenda in order that they may be used pragmatically in their national contexts. The Bologna Process was regularly contrasted by interviewees with the process in EU structures on education, especially by national representatives and stakeholders involved in both settings. These structures tended to be described as formal and not so participative. A difference often emphasized is that stakeholder representatives in the Bologna Process follow-up structures play much greater roles than in the EU decision-making groups in which they are not present on a regular basis.

10.3.1.2 *Informal processes*

Communication within the Bologna Process follow-up structures is characterized, according to many interviewees, as informal and the structures are perceived as providing excellent networking possibilities and an effective setting for the exchange of information (communication is increasingly bilateral, outside official meetings). The informal structures and ways of communication lead to the fact that the involvement and influence of individual countries in the political process is highly dependent on the individual

persons representing these countries. Countries that continuously send the same, experienced representatives with good English language skills are perceived as having more impact on the process and on setting the political agenda. According to some interviewees, the talent of an individual representative can be a crucial factor for putting certain themes on the agenda or in the communiqués. Continuity in representation and personality of the representative usually mean much more than the size of the country or its geographical location. The countries frequently mentioned as being very active in the discussions are: Austria, all Benelux countries, France, Germany, all Nordic countries, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Croatia. The countries that joined the process at later stages are usually identified as less active or even inactive. The reasons for this are attributed to language problems and lack of continuity in representation (frequently changing representation or periods without any representation at all). Frequent changes of national governments or simple lack of interest are mentioned as reasons for this lack of continuity.

10.3.1.3 Strong involvement of stakeholder groups

The process is characterized by the vast majority of interviewees as a process in which there is strong involvement by the representatives of universities and students in the debates, and in which there is a strong overall feeling of ownership of the process. They are generally described as the drivers of the process and as dominant in the discussions. The presence of stakeholders in the Bologna Process developed gradually and they were involved as consultative members at different phases of the process. Representatives of universities and the Council of Europe were already there in the initial phases, while student representatives pressed for their involvement and became consultative members in Prague 2001, along with EURASHE. UNESCO/CEPES joined the group of consultative members two years later in Berlin, while representatives of employers (the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations in Europe, then UNICE, now BusinessEurope) and trade unions in education (Education International) were accepted as consultative members in 2005.

The presence of stakeholders in the process of decision making in the Bologna Process is identified as one of its major strengths. Fullness of involvement of all higher education stakeholders (especially higher education institutions and students) was mentioned by many interviewees as a crucial factor for success in the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms in the national contexts. At the same time, the presence of stakeholders adds to the already large number of parties involved; in combination with the many issues on the table that tends to slow down the decision-making process, which was deplored by some interviewees.

At the European level not all stakeholders are equally present and well-represented in the discussions. The most active are representatives of students (ESU), universities (EUA) and the Council of Europe. The presence of students and university representatives as key stakeholders in the sector is positively perceived by all interviewed persons and they are considered crucial for the implementation of the goals set. Some of the stakeholders, e.g. Education International, contribute significantly to bringing global issues into the Bologna for a, especially issues related to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Some interviewees explained the prominence of consultative members in discussions within follow-up structures as a result of the continuity of their presence in the BFUG and its Board over the years. They also tend to be perceived as having much expertise and being very well prepared for the meetings. Moreover they tend to send

people from higher ranks in their organisations in comparison with the national representatives. The representatives of stakeholder organisations usually agreed with the observation that they are very prominent in discussions within follow-up structures, however some of them pointed out that they do not have so much influence on the actual agenda-setting in the process of communiqué drafting. It was often indicated that the points of view of employers and professional higher education institutions should be made more prominent in the discussions than they are now. Many interviewees agreed that as a positive side-effect of the experiences in the Bologna Process at the European level, many countries had increased consultations with stakeholders at the national level; yet this was not the case in all countries.

Some of the ministry representatives stressed that representatives of the academics from the national level should be more involved in the Bologna Process at the international level, because they are a major factor for successful implementation of many action areas. According to some interviewees their limited involvement leads to the risk that the Bologna Process becomes a bureaucratic process without any real impact on higher education practice.

10.3.1.4 Perceived achievements, strengths and weaknesses of the Bologna Process

The interviewees were asked in an open question to identify three main achievements, three strengths and three weaknesses of the Bologna Process. Most of the achievements mentioned were substantial ones, linked with some of the major Bologna Process dimensions discussed in previous chapters. However, with regard to the main achievements of the Bologna Process from the management perspective, the following issues were mentioned.

The creation of a common higher education language by focusing on similar issues across the EHEA countries, as well as structures for meeting each other regularly, allowed for improved communication between countries about higher education. The Bologna Process in fact achieved creation of a pan-European, international platform including all intergovernmental and international organisations of different origins (governmental such as the Council of Europe, or representing stakeholders such as the ESU). This was regarded as a major achievement. Next to the official international discussions, the existence of the Bologna forum acted as an effective network, enabling increased bilateral communication between individual ministries responsible for higher education.

The Bologna Process had also helped to put higher education much more firmly on the political agenda in virtually all countries than a decade or two ago.

Regarding the major strengths of the Bologna Process as a policy process, in the interviews first of all the informal nature of the process was mentioned, which was said to gave all actors possibilities for interaction, communication and for adaptation of the agenda. The fact that it is pan-European process gave opportunities to more than just the EU countries to take part on equal footing, which was appreciated—and not just in the countries concerned. At the same time, interviewees noted that the decision-making process had proceeded with respect for diversity across the participating countries: the openness of the approach meant that room was given for implementation of decisions on aims and principles that remained in line with countries' traditions and practices, and not necessarily in exactly the same way in every country.

This went hand in hand with what is sometimes called a surprisingly high degree of willingness among many different actors in the Bologna Process to cooperate and to be involved in this decision-making process.

In combination, the two factors of openness and willingness led to a highly participative decision-making process, including—mentioned again—strong stakeholder involvement. An underlying factor that may have made this type of process possible was the voluntary and intergovernmental nature of the process, which also regularly was mentioned as a strength.

The flexibility and informality of the process also were seen by interviewees as factors contributing to its ability to create peer pressure between ministries, which contributed to their willingness to implement reforms. Creation of peer pressure also was the basic logic of *Stocktaking* exercises. Clearly then, this logic worked well to motivate reforms in signatory countries.

Weaknesses that were mentioned by our interviewees were quite different across the respondents. Most of the following were mentioned by one to three (different) persons each; nevertheless they might stimulate further thinking. Issues mentioned more often will be indicated.

First, there were a number of process issues. It was remarked that some issues are not discussed properly in the decision-making fora in the Bologna Process, because people have different understandings of key terms, e.g. qualifications frameworks. Agenda-setting was also criticised by some respondents, because they saw some countries representatives constantly trying to put new issues on the agenda, and in combination with the informality of the process this could lead to the political agenda being set by those who speak most. In the context of the process, some also deplored the loss of continuity that tended to occur because of the rotation of positions in the BFUG, its board and secretariat. Recently, there have been some voices to establish a permanent secretariat.

The second and largest group of comments concerned implementation issues. In particular, in a relatively large set of at least eight interviews the pace of implementation of the Bologna Process was perceived to be too slow in general, though with large diversity across countries. There were different levels of implementation in different countries and within different dimensions, sometimes called implementation *à la carte* (set of issues mentioned in eight). Implementation of national reforms was not always linked with the Bologna agenda, but with other (domestic) interests. A few interviewees in this context noted that as an international process the Bologna Process of course has no possibility to do more than put peer pressure on countries that do not implement action areas or do not participate fully.

In a related point, some remarked that the focus of implementation should be on achieving the aims (especially mobility and recognition), rather than on applying similar policies in all countries. Moreover, within countries higher education institutions should be allowed more flexibility in the means to achieve the Bologna Process aims.

In some cases implementation was said to take place to the extent of passing legislation, but it was not realised ‘on the ground’, i.e. in higher education institutions, where a certain fatigue with regard to reforms was noted.

For some countries, the lack of financial resources for reforms was seen as a problem, and the fact that in the Bologna Process there was much dependence on EU funding, although the Bologna Process is not an EU process.

A third set of perceived weaknesses had to do with the fact that Bologna action areas sometimes reached beyond the area of competence of ministers responsible for higher education, e.g. visas, work permits, pension rights etc., which however would be needed for goal achievement. A link that some would like to see was between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA).

The fourth and final group of comments had to do with feedback and reaching out of the Bologna Process. Effective models of evaluation of achievements in the Bologna Process have not yet been found, some said. Another remark was that the process becomes inward looking and understood only by people dealing with it, while there is insufficient public information for the highly needed public understanding and support.

From these internal perceptions of the Bologna Process as a policy process we derive four main conclusions. First, the flexibility of the Bologna Process can be characterised as its main strength, but it also leads to uneven participation and uneven implementation. To some extent, we take it that implementation *needs to be* uneven because of the different higher education system contexts. According to some sources it should be even more uneven than now in the sense of focusing more on the aims rather than on rigid application of the means. However there is a need to find a balance between the freedom given to countries to pursue their own agendas and the extent that this is used as an excuse for not implementing Bologna.

Another conclusion is that there is often a lack of clarity among participants in the BFUG about responsibilities and roles of different actors. It is not clear even to participants to what extent the Bologna Process is driven by institutional needs (some mentioned its bottom-up character as a positive point), by (very different) national agendas, by individual policy entrepreneurs, or by the EU.

A third conclusion is that there is a tension between the necessary expertise (does everyone involved understand the technical issues under discussion sufficiently—and in a sufficiently similar way to achieve compatibility?) and the equally necessary involvement of the wider society, first of all of the higher education institutions (there was talk of reform fatigue) but also of the general public.

Finally it can be concluded that the process did not find a proper method of policy monitoring which sharply pinpoints actual achievements, stimulates countries that are now lagging in implementation, and at the same time enables public understanding yet avoids window-dressing in order for country actors to look good. There was some dissatisfaction with the *Stocktaking* process as implemented until recently.

10.3.2 External perceptions: protests and critical voices

‘The misery of the European higher education institution has a name: Bologna’ (Liessmann, 2008). This is only one of the many critical statements about the Bologna Process coming from student protests or from individual academics. Student protests against the Bologna Process have been reported in a number of European countries in the last two years. Usually in these cases students protest against issues related to national

higher education reform agendas (mostly connected to funding and governance of higher education); issues actually related to the Bologna Process represent only a rather small part of the protest topics. It is noticeable that student protests related to the Bologna Process are very frequent and extensively covered by the press in the German speaking countries—Germany, Austria and Switzerland. There have also been student protests reported to be partly about Bologna Process reforms in Belgium, Croatia, Greece, France, Italy, Spain, Serbia and Greece. The on-line newspaper databases in other European countries that we checked either did not report student protests or reported protests that were not related to the Bologna Process. It seems that student protests against the Bologna Process occurred most frequently in countries where higher education structures and curricula are changing significantly due to reforms inspired by the Bologna Process e.g. Croatia, Germany, Italy, Serbia and Spain. Another explanation seems to be that the Bologna Process-related reforms came in parallel with changes in university governance or with the introduction of tuition fees e.g. in Austria, and partly in Germany.

Certain commonalities among the arguments used against Bologna Process reforms emerged from the newspapers:

- The Bologna Process is perceived as a process which ‘commodifies’ higher education and ‘turns universities into factories’. There are also concerns that Bologna Process reforms foster only profitable and professional- and practice-related programmes.
- The new study systems are often seen as ‘school-like’, focussed on efficiency and not on quality.
- Often there are concerns about the professional relevance of the new degrees, especially newly-introduced Bachelor’s degrees, in the labour market.
- In general the Bologna critique is linked more to national interpretations of the process goals, and the overall goals themselves are rarely criticised.
- Apart from the ministerial conferences, the work and decision making within Bologna Process structures at the European level (BFUG) is usually not followed in the press and the articles mainly tackle national policy actors. However the non-specified decisions at the European level are often referred to as a justification for the particular national reforms (e.g. various kinds of ECTS allocation, introduction of obligatory class attendance requirements for students etc.).

The critical voices among some university professors and their organisations (see e.g. Liessmann, 2009 or the Bologna Black Book of the German university professors’ association) share some of the critique raised by the student protests. In addition, they tend to criticise Bologna as a set of reforms that ruin the idea of the European university, especially the traditional link between research and teaching. Turning universities into ‘teaching factories’ focused on the efficient production of insufficiently educated graduates is perceived as the main outcome of the Bologna Process. In addition, the change of degrees and their titles (for example the German title of dipl. ing.) is seen as unnecessary and as ruining widely known and accepted degrees.

The analysis of newspaper articles and the interviews conducted with national representatives and with stakeholder organisations suggest that the Bologna Process proved to be a very useful political platform for many political entrepreneurs at the European and national levels: they identified the potential of this open and flexible

political platform for the promotion of different national policy agendas and the implementation of reforms perceived to be necessary. Much more resistance would be faced if they communicated their plans as reform initiatives of individual national governments.

The Bologna Process tends to be pragmatically used as a rationale and communicated to national stakeholders and the general public in different ways in different countries. Three main (not mutually exclusive) rationales can be identified and they usually receive different priority in different countries:

- **Europeanisation**; this rationale is very prominent across countries and it is evident in some of the interviews and case studies when the Bologna Process is discussed in the national context. This rationale implies that the Bologna Process is seen as a way to bring national higher education systems closer to other European countries, as part of a process of European integration, or as a process which enables mobility and makes recognition easier.
- **International and global competitiveness**: this rationale is present as the main driver of Bologna-related reforms at the national level in some, mostly large countries. Reforms are then communicated as leading to improved international and global competitiveness.
- **Problems internal to the national higher education system** e.g. lack of efficiency, quality, or participation. The Bologna Process is regularly communicated as a process that is supposed to help solve internal systemic problems of higher education systems mostly related to the lack of efficiency (high drop-out rates, long average duration of studies etc). As noted, some newspaper articles and interviews indicated that some countries use the Bologna Process to implement national agendas, which are communicated as part of the Bologna Process action lines. This contributes to a public perception across Europe that many higher education reforms are an integral part of the Bologna package, and hence to resistance to a ‘Bologna Process’ that is triggered by national reforms that are often actually not linked with the action areas defined in official documents of the Bologna Process.

10.4 Assessment of the management of the Bologna Process

The following statements all are paraphrases from the interviews with representatives in the Bologna Follow-up group. Some of these mirror conclusions reached in other chapters through other methods.

Main goals stated

The follow-up structure should:

- Organise ‘constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs’ (1999).
- Pursue the ways of ‘intergovernmental cooperation’ in collaboration with stakeholder organizations, especially higher education institutions and learners, as partners (1999).

To make this more explicit, we interpreted adequate management of the process as:

- The division of tasks between Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), BFUG Board and the Bologna Secretariat should be clearly defined, avoiding duplication of tasks.
- Work should be transparent and open to individual country initiatives.
- The process should be well coordinated ensuring a good internal and external flow of information about developments.
- The process should be supported administratively by a politically independent Bologna Secretariat.

What was different ten years ago, before Bologna?

- Higher education in Europe was a policy field considered to belong almost exclusively to national policy making. Interviews confirm that it was rare that individual ministry representatives communicated and learned from each other, and if it happened, this was in e.g. the Council of Europe setting or as a part of European Union ministerial meetings.
- Barriers for more convergence and communication between higher education authorities in Europe were structurally very different higher education systems and regulation practices, and we noted the non-existence of a ‘common higher education language’.
- Some initiatives to stimulate mobility of students had already been initiated e.g. creation of the Erasmus mobility programme and instruments like ECTS and the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
- Broader cooperation between higher education authorities in different European countries was mainly limited to regional cooperation e.g. Nordic or Baltic countries.
- Representation of universities, labour unions and student unions at the European level existed in less formalized structures and with more limited mandates. European universities were represented through two organizations, the Association of European Universities (CRE) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors’ Conferences. Student unions were represented by the ESIB, but that organization was much smaller than ESU now is, and cooperated with other stakeholders and authorities only in much more informal ways.

What progress has been made over the past decade in terms of the objectives of the Bologna Process?

The following statements all are paraphrases from our interviews. Some of these mirror conclusions reached in other chapters through other methods.

- A common higher education language and functional structures have been created, which promote communication between countries about higher education.
- The Bologna Process structure is unique because it is pan-European, inter-governmental, and includes stakeholder organizations as consultative partners. This structure is characterized in interviews as very different and more effective when compared with structures in the European Union.

- Work within the BFUG is characterized by informality in the plenary BFUG and its subgroups. Openness of the process towards individual country initiatives is usually praised as a major strength of the process.
- Bilateral communication between individual ministries responsible for higher education increased. The current Bologna structures are described as a good platform for information exchange and networking.
- Stakeholder organizations (representatives of higher education institutions, learners, employers and employees) are consulted much more in decision-making on higher education at the European level and within many national contexts.

Assessment

- The existing Bologna Follow Up structure is intergovernmental and involves stakeholder representatives adequately.
- It is characterised as open to individual country initiatives and in general has proved capable of supporting and supervising the process adequately.
- The extent of adaptation to continuously evolving needs is not as satisfactory and the current structure, although effective for the purposes of consensus seeking and political negotiation over changing process goals, is not able to answer properly to the challenges of the implementation phases of the process. The goals and desired outcomes are not defined precisely, and in some cases are not well communicated nationally, which leads to different implementation across Europe.
- The BFUG and its Board are not equally used by all Bologna Process members. The discussions are said to be often dominated by representatives of a small number of countries and by some consultative members. There is no clear division of work between the BFUG and its Board. The Board functions to some extent as a small BFUG rather than preparing BFUG meetings, as it discusses documents that have to be discussed again at BFUG meetings, which is the only group with decision-making power.
- In a number of countries the communication of discussions and political actions between BFUG and national higher education actors in charge of policy and implementation is intermittent or non-existing. The lack of continuity among persons representing countries on the BFUG is the most frequently mentioned reason for this.
- The Bologna Follow-Up Group's Secretariat has sometimes been criticized for being under the political influence of the hosting countries especially in the process of drafting the communiqué of the ministerial meeting.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be successful?

- The Bologna Follow Up Group has established itself as a good platform for preparing strategic decisions about higher education in the European Higher Education Area.
- The level of political commitment towards the Bologna process goals has remained stable and high over the past 10 years.

- The involvement of stakeholders at the European level has proved crucial for the dissemination of information about the Bologna Process at the national level as well.
- As a result of the financial support of the European Commission, much of the work of Bologna follow-up structures has been made possible. Even more important is the financial support for the concrete implementation of many Bologna process means e.g. student mobility, ECTS implementation, qualification frameworks, and the Tuning project. The support for ECTS coordinators and counsellors and later for Bologna promoters (later called Bologna experts) contributed to the dissemination of good practices.
- The establishment of the Bologna Secretariat located in the host country of the next ministerial meeting helped the administration of the process at the European level and contributed to the continuity of the discussions.

Which actions, reforms and policies have proved to be less successful?

- The existing Bologna Process structures (BFUG and its Board) are not equally used by all Bologna Process members. The discussions are said to be often dominated by representatives of a small number of countries and by some consultative members.
- There is no clear division of work between BFUG and BFUG Board. The Board functions partly as basically a smaller BFUG, discussing documents that have to be discussed again at BFUG meetings, which is the only group with decision-making power.
- The work of the BFUG tends to be increasingly bureaucratized and overburdened by reporting and administrative preparation of the next ministerial summit. This takes away time and energy needed for policy discussions on e.g. more precise definition of the goals of the Bologna Process needed in the implementation process.
- In many countries the transfer back and forth of discussions and political actions between BFUG and national higher education actors in charge of policy and implementation is intermittent or non-existing. Lack of continuity of country representation in the BFUG is the reason most frequently mentioned in interviews. Some interviewees wondered if frequent changes of persons reflected lower levels of countries' political interest and commitment.
- Accepting new countries into the Bologna Process was not followed by effective support mechanisms to help the implementation of Bologna action lines in these 'new' countries.
- Sanctions (e.g. losing membership of the Bologna Process) for non-participation and non-implementation are unthinkable, yet participants would want to be able to ensure active participation and implementation in all countries.
- The management of the process lacks precisely defined goals, which is an obstacle for coherent implementation in different countries. This needs balancing with focusing on ultimate aims rather than on mechanistic implementation of means. However, very broadly defined goals do not allow for the proper monitoring of the process.

- The Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat is sometimes criticized for being under the political influence of the hosting countries, especially in the process of drafting the communiqué of the ministerial meeting.
- The imperative of belonging to the European Higher Education Area was used in many countries to advocate other reforms, which are part of the national reform agendas but are not mentioned in the Bologna Process documents. The result is that in a number of countries almost all higher education reforms including reforms of governance and funding are communicated nationally as belonging to the Bologna Process. The criticisms towards Bologna Process visible through student protests and the critical voices of some academics often target reforms not mentioned in official Bologna Process documents.

11 Overall Conclusions

11.1 General Observations

Beyond and across the different action areas, some general observations can be made concerning the achievement of the goals of the Bologna Process in its first decade.

- Higher education across the EHEA countries looks substantially different from ten years ago—perhaps with the exception of the social dimension. Degree structures and curricula have been reformed, other policies and instruments have been much more widely applied (LRC, ECTS, DS, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, etc.) and all of this has contributed to making European higher education more attractive in the world.
- The discourse about higher education within the EHEA has changed from an almost exclusively national affair with some international influences to one where national policy is systematically considered within a Europe-wide framework, with the exception of very few countries.
- Higher education has gained a much more significant position on the overall national and European political agendas as a result of the Bologna Process.
- Most Bologna Process member countries have adopted new higher education legislation to introduce and regulate elements of the Bologna process. Many countries have allocated additional funds for the implementation of new Bologna policies.
- There is a large difference in the speed of implementation between individual countries. While some countries have shown considerable progress in implementing almost all action areas, other countries have still to start on some. This creates a European Higher Education Area of different speeds of implementation and varying levels of commitment.
- The extent to which the key objectives of compatibility, comparability and attractiveness (desired outcomes of the Bologna Process) will be achieved is still partly an open question. First, it is too early to answer the question across all participating countries because achieving some of the desired outcomes will require many years of post-implementation experience (especially labour market effects and those involving all three cycles). Second, even among countries that were on the whole high achievement cases, compatibility and comparability have not yet been fully achieved.
- From a learner perspective a similar conclusion applies to inter-cycle mobility. In all EHEA countries learners now have the option to continue second or third cycle studies in other EHEA countries, given the principle of the recognition of first cycle degrees. Yet establishing a fully transparent higher education area requires further efforts in the areas of recognition and student support. Student mobility within the EHEA has not increased substantially.
- Mobility towards the EHEA has increased substantially.

- Increasing staff mobility both within and outside the EHEA also needs further implementation of supporting policies, especially those regarding social security, pension funds and work permits.
- The operation of the intergovernmental process (stocktaking, national reports) has emphasised policy initiatives and plans. The crucial question about the outcomes of the process in terms of its key objectives (compatibility, comparability, competitiveness) has not been addressed to the same extent.
- Monitoring achievements nationally as well as for the EHEA as a whole needs better data. The focus should be on sound and comparable indicators that give insight into goal achievement.

11.2 Summary assessment

Strategic goal: Establishing the European Higher Education Area

- Most ‘architectural’ elements of the EHEA, i.e. those involving legislation and national regulation, have been implemented. Goals in need of further attention have been identified above.
 - Countries that joined the Bologna Process later, as a general rule have not yet fully caught up with the extent of implementation achieved in many, though not all, countries that joined from the beginning.
 - No country is perfect: even ‘high-achieving’ countries that joined from the beginning need to give further attention to some action areas.
- The impact of established architecture on substantive goal achievement at the level of higher education institutions and study programmes is far from having been achieved; however, this is not easily shown in a formal assessment of goal achievement at the level of the EHEA and countries.
 - Greater involvement of staff within higher education institutions and other non-state actors may be a key factor for successful implementation of many Bologna action areas in the practice of education.
 - The perceived gap in the provided quality of education between countries needs to be reduced to achieve a coherent higher education system in the EHEA.
 - Attention in the second decade of the Bologna Process needs to turn to the achievement of the substantive, strategic goals more than to further refinement of the architecture.
- Data on key outcomes such as widened participation and mobility need serious improvement to enable better assessment.

Strategic goal: Promote the European system of higher education world-wide

- The growing ‘market share’ of the EHEA in worldwide student mobility proves that European higher education has become more attractive since the Bologna Declaration.

- The growth of mobility is concentrated in some Western European countries. Overall, then, the goal has been reached, but the geographical imbalance may require further attention.
- International observers and students do not perceive the EHEA as an area providing a uniform level of higher education degrees.
- Cooperation between higher education institutions from EHEA countries and counterparts abroad has increased.
- The Bologna Process has become a major focus of attention for regional and sometimes also national higher education policy-making around the world (e.g. in China and in the USA).
- Further information provision remains necessary to give a complete picture of the coherence of the reforms in the Bologna Process to stakeholders in other parts of the world.

11.3 Key challenges for the next years

11.3.1 *Maintain political momentum in the Bologna Process*

A challenge for the Bologna Process is to keep up the political momentum and the interest of political leadership in the reform processes. This is needed to minimise the risk of the process becoming a bureaucratic process with little impact on the reality of higher education.

We have noticed a tendency to place highly relevant but broad and complex issues on the Bologna Process agenda, in particular the social dimension. Addressing such broad questions requires a patient and realistic approach to implementation, including concrete action lines which can be successfully monitored from the point of view of goal achievement.

11.3.2 *Different degrees and speeds of implementation*

There are different speeds in the implementation of the Bologna Process action areas across the 46 countries. This has to do with varying national agendas, with when different countries joined the Bologna Process, with differences in the distribution of authority nationally as well as with different experiences and traditions regarding higher education policy making. Yet an additional contributing factor to the differing implementation patterns across different countries is a lack of financial resources in many newcomer countries to the Bologna Process, given that most of the international financial support for the introduction of Bologna-related reforms comes from European Commission programmes, to which some newcomers have limited access (mostly only through the Tempus programme). This difference is most visible in student mobility. There is a need for more systemic assistance and support for these countries. Until now, support has been provided by the Council of Europe and some individual countries, but more organised action by the BFUG and more bilateral action and cooperation between different ministries should be encouraged.

11.3.3 *Making reforms a reality: Qualifications frameworks and the involvement of teachers and students*

Now that most of the architecture of the EHEA is in place, the crucial step is to make this structure into a reality that is ‘lived and loved’ by teachers and learners, for this is the level where the EHEA is being created. Regulations and policies can only create the conditions for the actual process of teaching and learning, and the current wave of resistance and protests (even if much of this is directed at issues that are not inherently part of the Bologna Process) shows that the EHEA is not yet sufficiently accepted by learners and teachers as a positive, interesting and challenging project. The strategic idea of creating compatibility of higher education outcomes across Europe appears to be experienced as rules that make higher education more hemmed in by regulations, ‘school-like’ and with less room for short-term (credit) mobility.

The capstone of the architecture and the bridge to focusing on the compatibility of the outcomes of education should be the national qualifications frameworks (NQF). Their implementation in higher education institutions should make the common goals of the EHEA clearer to teachers and learners, showing a positive gain for teaching and learning. The NQFs are now on the ‘critical path’ of the implementation of the EHEA and their completion by 2012 is necessary to make the EHEA a positive reality by 2020. The 2012 deadline is important, because if it takes on average some three years (until 2015) to adapt curricula to an NQF—some programmes will be due for renewal earlier, others later—, then the first major cohort of learners of the renewed programmes will graduate from the first cycle after three years (2018) and from the second cycle one to two years later (2019–2020). 2020 will then be the year when the EHEA’s content as well as its architecture becomes a reality.

Abbreviations

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| BFUG | Bologna Follow-Up Group |
| CRE | <i>Conférence des Recteurs Européens</i> , later changed to Association of European Universities; one of the precursor organisations of EUA (q.v.) |
| DS | Diploma Supplement |
| E4 | Name used for the collective of ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (q.v.) |
| ECTS | European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System |
| EHEA | European Higher Education Area |
| ENIC-NARIC | European Network of Information Centres – National Academic Recognition Information Centres |
| ENQA | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education |
| EQAR | European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education |
| EQF | European Qualifications Framework |
| ESG | European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education |
| ESIB | <i>European Student Information Bureau</i> ; name until 1993 and abbreviation until 2007 of The National Unions of Students in Europe, later renamed into ESU (q.v.) |
| ESU | European Students' Unions; name since 2007 of what previously was ESIB |
| EU | European Union |
| EUA | European University Association; EUA is the result of a merger between the CRE (q.v.) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences, 2001 |
| EURASHE | European Association of Institutions in Higher Education |
| JQI | Joint Quality Initiative |
| LLL | Lifelong learning |
| LRC | Lisbon Recognition Convention |
| NQF | National qualifications framework |
| QF-EHEA | Qualifications Framework for the EHEA |
| RPL | Recognition of prior learning |

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