

Frequently Asked Questions: the Bologna Process

On 17-18 May, in London, the 45 participating countries plus the European Commission, other international organisations and stakeholders will take part in a stocktaking conference on the Bologna Process.

1 – What is the Bologna Process?

The Bologna Process aims to **create a European Higher Education Area by 2010**, in which students can choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures. It is an attempt by the European Ministers with responsibility for higher education to bring some order into the large variety of degrees which exist, to make European higher education more compatible and comparable as well as more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for citizens and scholars from other continents.

The three priorities of the Bologna process are: Introduction of the three cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate), quality assurance and recognition of qualifications and periods of study.

Every second year the Ministers meet to measure progress and set priorities for action. After Bologna (1999), they met in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005). They will meet again in London (17/18 May 2007) and in Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve (May 2009).

2 – How many countries are participating?

The Bologna process has grown from **29 countries in 1999 to 45¹ today** and one more country (Montenegro) will join in London.

The criteria for accession to the process are:

- being a signatory to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe
- giving a clear commitment to the objectives of the Bologna Process and presenting a reform programme for the candidate country's higher education system.

¹ All EU Member States (Belgium includes Flanders & French Community) + Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Holy See, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Norway, FYROM, Russia, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey & Ukraine

3 – What is the current state of the process?

Good progress has been made in implementing the main Bologna reforms as will be demonstrated by the Bologna Stocktaking Report, to be presented to Ministers in London. This positive conclusion is supported by the Commission's Eurydice report "Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2006/07 - National Trends in the Bologna Process". The **three cycle system has been adopted by almost all signatory countries**; most countries have an independent body for quality assurance; the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has been made obligatory in most signatory countries and is most commonly used for both credit transfer and accumulation; the Diploma Supplement is a widespread measure. Additional efforts are needed in the field of lifelong learning.

4 – What are the main decisions expected in London?

Important decisions are expected in **two main fields**: quality assurance and the external dimension of the Bologna Process.

Quality assurance

In London, Ministers will welcome the establishment of a **Register of European Quality Assurance Agencies**. The Register will assist in furthering the development of the European Higher Education Area by providing clear and reliable information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The Register will help to raise the visibility of European higher education and boost confidence in institutions and programmes within Europe and worldwide. The Register will list both national quality assurance agencies (members of ENQA, the European association for quality assurance in higher education) and agencies operating on a European or global scale.

The Register was specifically requested by Bologna Ministers in Bergen in 2005 as well as by EU Ministers and the European Parliament in a 2006 Recommendation. The Register has been prepared by ENQA (the European association for quality assurance in higher education) and stakeholders from the higher education sector: EUA (European University Association) EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), ESIB (The National Unions of Students in Europe) with the support of the European Commission. **The Commission is planning to provide start-up funding in 2007 and 2008.**

A Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process

Ministers in London will adopt an external dimension strategy "The European Higher Education Area in a Global Context". The strategy is a **response to the growing need to ensure the visibility and openness of European higher education in the world**, both vis-à-vis neighbouring countries and other continents. International contacts and mobility are increasing in numbers and intensity, and so is inter-university cooperation. The proposed strategy comprises a set of principles and activities in the fields of information, promotion, attractiveness competition, partnerships, recognition of qualifications and policy dialogue. The strategy is strongly connected to policies and programmes of the European Union.

5 – What is the role of the European Commission and the European Union in the Bologna Process?

The Commission supports the Bologna process in order to assist Member States in their efforts to modernise their education systems in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, which also encompasses reinforced cooperation in vocational education and training (Copenhagen Process).

Most of the Bologna action lines (like quality assurance, mobility, double and joint degrees, the ECTS credit system and the Diploma Supplement) **originate in EU funded Erasmus activities**. The EU continues to support these activities through Erasmus, now part of the new Lifelong Learning Programme.

The EU equally supports a broad range of capacity-building measures to **modernise the content and practices of higher education in 26 neighbouring countries** and to bring their systems in line with the Bologna requirements, through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) and more particularly through the **Tempus** programme, which has an annual budget of about €55 million. In the past 17 years, Tempus has funded 6500 university cooperation projects, involving 2000 universities from the EU and its partner countries. Of special importance in a global context is the EU's flagship programme for worldwide academic cooperation **Erasmus Mundus**.

The EU also works to support the modernisation agenda of universities through the implementation of the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research (European Research Area) and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme as well as the Structural Funds and loans from the European Investment Bank.

To establish synergies between the Bologna process and the Copenhagen process, which concerns vocational education and training, the Commission has brought forward a proposal for a **European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)**. The EQF proposal is linked to and supported by other initiatives in the fields of transparency of qualifications (EUROPASS), credit transfer (the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System for higher education — ECTS — and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training — ECVET) and quality assurance (European association for quality assurance in higher education — ENQA — and the European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training — ENQA-AVET).

The **Commission is a full member of the Bologna Process**, next to the 45 signatory countries and the consultative members: EUA (European University Association) EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), ESIB (The National Unions of Students in Europe), Council of Europe, UNESCO, ENQA and the social partners Education International and Business Europe.

6 – What are the next steps?

Countries and institutions which have not yet fully introduced the Bologna reforms will have to step up their efforts in order to reach the common objective of establishing the European Higher Education Area by 2010. The EU will continue to support Member States and neighbouring countries through its programmes. The Commission will also continue to support the broader modernisation agenda for universities², so that they can fully play their role in the global knowledge society.

More information :

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/>

<http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice>

² “Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities” Education, [Research and Innovation COM\(2006\)208 final](#), of 10 May 2006 -

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/comuniv2006_en.pdf