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Action

For information

Executive Summary

This E note seeks to provide Members with a short overview of the Berlin ministerial summit and highlight key areas for UK HEIs' engagement.

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Berlin Ministerial Summit on the Bologna Process, September 2003

Introduction

1. The decisions reached at the Berlin ministerial summit mark a turning point in the development of the Bologna Process, to create the European Higher Education area (EHEA) by 2010. This E-note seeks to provide Members with an overview of the summit and its outcomes, while highlighting its implications for UK HEIs.
2. For further background information regarding the Bologna Process itself, Members are advised to refer to I-note I/03/79 ('Overview of the Bologna Process').

Background

3. Since the Bologna Declaration launched the Bologna Process in 1999, biennial ministerial summits have taken place to review progress made in the Process and establish priorities and objectives for the coming years. The second of these summits was held in Berlin in September 2003 and was attended by Ministers responsible for higher education in 33 European countries¹. Ministers discussed and approved a communiqué (attached as an annex) reviewing progress in the implementation of the Bologna reforms and identifying steps for future action. The next ministerial summit is scheduled to take place in Bergen, Norway, in May 2005.
4. Requests for membership of the Bologna Process were accepted from Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Holy See, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In welcoming these new members, Ministers expanded the Process to a total of 40 countries.
5. Many of the points emphasised by the UK government and HE stakeholders in the run-up to the summit have been taken on board and are included in the Berlin communiqué. Nevertheless, the text has

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significant implications for HEIs across Europe and the UK must remain vigilant on a number of key issues.

Quality Assurance

6. The communiqué identifies the need for action in quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. The text places the primary responsibility for quality assurance *within* HEIs themselves, stating that *“this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework”*.
7. At national level the text defines the responsibilities of bodies and institutions involved in QA, namely:
 - Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and publication of results.
 - A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
 - International participation, co-operation and networking.
8. At European level the text calls upon *“ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIBⁱⁱ, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to ensure an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies”*.
9. Attempts to introduce a pan-European system of external evaluation were resisted in the communiqué. However, the final shape of any agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines remains to be defined. UUK has stressed that European quality assurance procedures should not be bureaucratic or burdensome by adding an additional layer of evaluation. Engagement in discussions on the shape of a European quality assurance system is necessary to ensure that the Process develops in a way consistent with quality assurance arrangements in the UK. It is not clear that a consensus will be reached amongst stakeholders in time for the 2005 ministerial for which ministers have requested a report on the matter.
10. Professor Roderick Floud is a member of the European University Association’s (EUA) Quality Working Group charged with the creation of a HE Quality Assurance Committee which, involving HE stakeholders, is lead by HEIs.

European Qualifications Framework

11. Ministers at Berlin noted progress in the development of a two cycle model of qualifications across signatory countries – a key element of the Process. The communiqué calls for the two cycle system to be fully introduced by 2005. Member states are called on to elaborate *“a framework of national frameworks of comparable and compatible qualifications for their HE systems which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning*

outcomes, competences and profile". Member states also "*undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European higher Education area*".

12. It is important that any framework emerging as an "overarching framework" for the EHEA provides a structure against which national systems across Europe can articulate. An intrusive, detailed system to which signatory countries would need to adapt their existing systems is to be avoided. UK stakeholders must continue to play an active role in the ongoing negotiations to influence the final shape of such a qualifications framework. In February the Europe Unit co-hosted a seminar with the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI)ⁱⁱⁱ for a wide range of stakeholders from across Europe to work towards a common understanding of what a qualifications framework for Europe might look like.
13. The communiqué calls for an "*Investigation of how shorter HE^{iv} can be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework; and for qualification frameworks for the European Higher Education Area to encompass the wide ranging learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of ECTS credits*". Scotland and Wales already have qualifications frameworks which incorporate sub-HE programmes (the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales). England must consider how shorter HE and Lifelong Learning can be incorporated into a qualifications framework.

European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

14. The Berlin communiqué calls for the ECTS system to become "*an accumulation system*" in addition to a transfer system. There have been moves to develop a European credit system based on notional learning effort rather than outcomes achieved. A system focused on workload would damage the reputation of UK HE since the UK does not compare favourably to other European countries in this way (current credit systems indicate that the average academic year in continental countries is 1,600 hours which casts the UK norm of 1,200 in a bad light). UK credit bodies acknowledge 'credit' as a tool for measuring outcomes and expressing equivalent qualifications and see outcomes achieved as the best measure of students' preparedness and the intellectual demand on a learner. The communiqué does refer to the importance of learning outcomes when describing qualifications but it is vital that the UK monitors developments to ensure that learning outcomes remain central to the ECTS.
15. It is to be noted that Scotland and Wales have credit systems in place that are compatible with ECTS while England has no single credit system for universities. In this way, England risks being left behind in the pan-European move towards credit systems.

Research

16. The communiqué highlights the importance of research "*as an integral part of HE across Europe*" and calls for the inclusion of doctoral level qualifications as the third cycle of the



Bologna Process. It is hoped that the incorporation of doctoral studies would reinforce the link between the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area.

17. It is important that the above text does not lead to an inflexibly structured third cycle in the EHEA. Mobility at doctoral level stands to be enhanced by these new objectives.

Diploma Supplement

18. The communiqué calls on signatory countries to ensure that “*every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge*”. The Diploma Supplement is a short document recording students’ achievements and is widely used in European HEIs. UK institutions currently use Progress Files, the Transcript element of which is similar to Diploma Supplement. However, the Transcript lacks eight key data fields, meaning that effort will be needed from UK HEIs to introduce the Diploma Supplement by the 2005 deadline. Failure to do so would leave the UK out of step with the rest of Europe with potentially damaging effects on access to 2nd cycle courses across Europe. The Europe Unit is currently liaising with stakeholders on the UK response to this issue.

Role of the European Commission

19. Education is not a EU competency and remains firmly in the hands of EU member states. However, the influence of the European Commission in the Bologna Process has been steadily increasing. As the EU enlarges to incorporate the majority of Bologna signatory countries, the European Commission’s role in the Process is likely to develop further. As an important source of funding, the Commission can have a significant impact on Bologna Process activities. Recent Commission documents demonstrate a growing appreciation of the crucial role of HE in promoting EU priorities, such as the Lisbon Agenda to make the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy by 2010 and the creation of the European Research Area. The UK should continue to stress the intergovernmental nature of the Bologna Process and the ongoing need to respect the diversity of European HE systems.

Conclusions

20. The UK HE sector must enhance links with key players in the EU institutions in order to influence EU involvement in the Bologna Process. With this in mind, in July the UK is hosting a seminar on learning outcomes as part of the Bologna Process work programme at Edinburgh’s Herriot Watt University. The Europe Unit also publishes a monthly newsletter on European higher education issues and staff have spoken on the Bologna Process at numerous institutions. For more information, please contact Richard Ellis, Communications Officer, Europe Unit, on tel: 020 7419 5421, email: richard.ellis@universitiesuk.ac.uk.



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ⁱ The first Bologna Process follow-up summit was held in Prague in 2001.

ⁱⁱ ENQA – European Network for Quality Assurance, EUA – European University Association; EURASHE – European Association of Institutions in Higher Education; ESIB – National Union of Students in Europe.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Joint Quality Initiative is an informal network for quality assurance and accreditation of bachelor and master programmes in Europe. Participating countries include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, UK, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland.

^{iv} Shorter HE refers to post-secondary qualifications acquired before the end of the 1st cycle, that is, an intermediate level of the 1st cycle (HNCs, HNDs, Certificates of HE and Foundation Degrees).



“Realising the European Higher Education Area”

Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers
responsible for Higher Education
in Berlin on 19 September 2003

Preamble

On 19 June 1999, one year after the Sorbonne Declaration, Ministers responsible for higher education from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration. They agreed on important joint objectives for the development of a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area by 2010. In the first follow-up conference held in Prague on 19 May 2001, they increased the number of the objectives and reaffirmed their commitment to establish the European Higher Education Area by 2010. On 19 September 2003, Ministers responsible for higher education from 33 European countries met in Berlin in order to review the progress achieved and to set priorities and new objectives for the coming years, with a view to speeding up the realisation of the European Higher Education Area. They agreed on the following considerations, principles and priorities:

Ministers reaffirm the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process. 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 that context, Ministers reaffirm their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility. They emphasise that in international academic cooperation and exchanges, academic values should prevail.

Ministers take into due consideration the conclusions of the European Councils in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002) aimed at making Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” and calling for further action and closer co-operation in the context of the Bologna Process.

Ministers take note of the Progress Report commissioned by the Follow-up Group on the development of the Bologna Process between Prague and Berlin. They also take note of the Trends-III Report prepared by the European University Association (EUA), as well as of the results of the seminars, which were organised as part of the work programme between Prague and Berlin by several member States and Higher Education Institutions, organisations and students. Ministers further note the National Reports, which are evidence of the considerable progress being made in the application of the principles of the Bologna Process. Finally, they take note of the messages from the European Commission and the Council of Europe and acknowledge their support for the implementation of the Process.

Ministers agree that efforts shall be undertaken in order to secure closer links overall between the higher education and research systems in their respective countries. The emerging European Higher Education Area will benefit from synergies with the European Research Area, thus strengthening the basis of the Europe of Knowledge. The aim is to preserve Europe’s cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions, and to foster its potential of innovation and social and economic development through enhanced co-operation among European Higher Education Institutions.

Ministers recognise the fundamental role in the development of the European Higher Education Area played by Higher Education Institutions and student organisations. They take note of the message from the European University Association (EUA) arising from the Graz Convention of Higher Education Institutions, the contributions from the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the communications from ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe.

Ministers welcome the interest shown by other regions of the world in the development of the European Higher Education Area, and welcome in particular the presence of representatives from European countries not yet party to the Bologna Process as well as from the Follow-up Committee of the European Union, Latin America and Caribbean (EULAC) Common Space for Higher Education as guests at this conference.

Progress

Ministers welcome the various initiatives undertaken since the Prague Higher Education Summit to move towards more comparability and compatibility, to make higher education systems more transparent and to enhance the quality of European higher education at institutional and national levels. They appreciate the co-operation and commitment of all partners - Higher Education Institutions, students and other stakeholders - to this effect.

Ministers emphasise the importance of all elements of the Bologna Process for establishing the European Higher Education Area and stress the need to intensify the efforts at institutional, national and European level. However, to give the Process further momentum, they commit themselves to intermediate priorities for the next two years. They will strengthen their efforts to promote effective quality assurance systems, to step up effective use of the system based on two cycles and to improve the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies.

Quality Assurance

The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance.

They also stress that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

Therefore, they agree that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop 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, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005. Due account will be taken of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks.

Degree structure: Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles

Ministers are pleased to note that, following their commitment in the Bologna Declaration to the two-cycle system, a comprehensive restructuring of the European landscape of higher education is now under way. All Ministers commit themselves to having started the implementation of the two cycle system by 2005.

Ministers underline the importance of consolidating the progress made, and of improving understanding and acceptance of the new qualifications through reinforcing dialogue within institutions and between institutions and employers.

Ministers encourage the member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. 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. First cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes. Second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies.

Ministers invite the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.

Ministers stress their commitment to making higher education equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means.

Promotion of mobility

Mobility of students and academic and administrative staff is the basis for establishing a European Higher Education Area. Ministers emphasise its importance for academic and cultural as well as political, social and economic spheres. They note with satisfaction that since their last meeting, mobility figures have increased, thanks also to the substantial support of the European Union programmes, and agree to undertake the necessary steps to improve the quality and coverage of statistical data on student mobility.

They reaffirm their intention to make every effort to remove all obstacles to mobility within the European Higher Education Area. With a view to promoting student mobility, Ministers will take the necessary steps to enable the portability of national loans and grants.

Establishment of a system of credits

Ministers stress the important role played by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development. They note that ECTS is increasingly becoming a generalised basis for the national credit systems. They encourage further progress with the goal that the ECTS becomes not only a transfer but also an accumulation system, to be applied consistently as it develops within the emerging European Higher Education Area.

Recognition of degrees: Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

Ministers underline the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process, and call on the ENIC and NARIC networks along with the competent National Authorities to further the implementation of the Convention.

They set the objective that every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. It should be issued in a widely spoken European language.

They appeal to institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies.

Higher education institutions and students

Ministers welcome the commitment of Higher Education Institutions and students to the Bologna Process and recognise that it is ultimately the active participation of all partners in the Process that will ensure its long-term success.

Aware of the contribution strong institutions can make to economic and societal development, Ministers accept that institutions need to be empowered to take decisions on their internal organisation and administration. Ministers further call upon institutions to ensure that the reforms become fully integrated into core institutional functions and processes.

Ministers note the constructive participation of student organisations in the Bologna Process and underline the necessity to include the students continuously and at an early stage in further activities.

Students are full partners in higher education governance. Ministers note that national legal measures for ensuring student participation are largely in place throughout the European Higher Education Area. They also call on institutions and student organisations to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in higher education governance.

Ministers stress the need for appropriate studying and living conditions for the students, so that they can successfully complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background. They also stress the need for more comparable data on the social and economic situation of students.

Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

Ministers note that, following their call in Prague, additional modules, courses and curricula with European content, orientation or organisation are being developed.

They note that initiatives have been taken by Higher Education Institutions in various European countries to pool their academic resources and cultural traditions in order to promote the development of integrated study programmes and joint degrees at first, second and third level.

Moreover, they stress the necessity of ensuring a substantial period of study abroad in joint degree programmes as well as proper provision for linguistic diversity and language learning, so that students may achieve their full potential for European identity, citizenship and employability.

Ministers agree to engage at the national level to remove legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of such degrees and to actively support the development and adequate quality assurance of integrated curricula leading to joint degrees.

Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

Ministers agree that the attractiveness and openness of the European higher education should be reinforced. They confirm their readiness to further develop scholarship programmes for students from third countries.

Ministers declare that transnational exchanges in higher education should be governed on the basis of academic quality and academic values, and agree to work in all appropriate fora to that end. In all appropriate circumstances such fora should include the social and economic partners.

They encourage the co-operation with regions in other parts of the world by opening Bologna seminars and conferences to representatives of these regions.

Lifelong learning

Ministers underline the important contribution of higher education in making lifelong learning a reality. They are taking steps to align their national policies to realise this goal and urge Higher Education Institutions and all concerned to enhance the possibilities for lifelong learning at higher education level including the recognition of prior learning. They emphasise that such action must be an integral part of higher education activity.

Ministers furthermore call those working on qualifications frameworks for the European Higher Education Area to encompass the wide range of flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of the ECTS credits.

They stress the need to improve opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the lifelong learning paths into and within higher education.

Additional Actions

European Higher Education Area and European Research Area – two pillars of the knowledge based society

Conscious of the need to promote closer links between the EHEA and the ERA in a Europe of Knowledge, and of the importance of research as an integral part of higher education across Europe, Ministers consider it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process. They emphasise the importance of research and research training and the promotion of interdisciplinarity in maintaining and improving the quality of higher education and in enhancing the competitiveness of European higher education more generally. Ministers call for increased mobility at the doctoral and postdoctoral levels and encourage the institutions concerned to increase their co-operation in doctoral studies and the training of young researchers.

Ministers will make the necessary effort to make European Higher Education Institutions an even more attractive and efficient partner. Therefore Ministers ask Higher Education Institutions to increase the role and relevance of research to technological, social and cultural evolution and to the needs of society.

Ministers understand that there are obstacles inhibiting the achievement of these goals and these cannot be resolved by Higher Education Institutions alone. It requires strong support, including financial, and appropriate decisions from national Governments and European Bodies.

Finally, Ministers state that networks at doctoral level should be given support to stimulate the development of excellence and to become one of the hallmarks of the European Higher Education Area.

Stocktaking

With a view to the goals set for 2010, it is expected that measures will be introduced to take stock of progress achieved in the Bologna Process. A mid-term stocktaking exercise would provide reliable information on how the Process is actually advancing and would offer the possibility to take corrective measures, if appropriate.

Ministers charge the Follow-up Group with organising a stocktaking process in time for their summit in 2005 and undertaking to prepare detailed reports on the progress and implementation of the intermediate priorities set for the next two years:

- quality assurance
- two-cycle system
- recognition of degrees and periods of studies

Participating countries will, furthermore, be prepared to allow access to the necessary information for research on higher education relating to the objectives of the Bologna Process. Access to data banks on ongoing research and research results shall be facilitated.

Further Follow-up

New members

Ministers consider it necessary to adapt the clause in the Prague Communiqué on applications for membership as follows:

Countries party to the European Cultural Convention shall be eligible for membership of the European Higher Education Area provided that they at the same time declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education. Their applications should contain information on how they will implement the principles and objectives of the declaration.

Ministers decide to accept the requests for membership of Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Holy See, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and to welcome these states as new members thus expanding the process to 40 European Countries.

Ministers recognise that membership of the Bologna Process implies substantial change and reform for all signatory countries. They agree to support the new signatory countries in those changes and reforms, incorporating them within the mutual discussions and assistance, which the Bologna Process involves.

Follow-up structure

Ministers entrust the implementation of all the issues covered in the Communiqué, the overall steering of the Bologna Process and the preparation of the next ministerial meeting to a Follow-up Group, which shall be composed of the representatives of all members of the Bologna Process and the European Commission, with the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE, ESIB and UNESCO/CEPES as consultative members. This group, which should be convened at least twice a year, shall be chaired by the EU Presidency, with the host country of the next Ministerial Conference as vice-chair.

A Board also chaired by the EU Presidency shall oversee the work between the meetings of the Follow-up Group. The Board will be composed of the chair, the next host country as vice-chair, the preceding and the following EU Presidencies, three participating countries elected by the Follow-up Group for one year, the European Commission and, as consultative members, the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB. The Follow-up Group as well as the Board may convene ad hoc working groups as they deem necessary.

The overall follow-up work will be supported by a Secretariat which the country hosting the next Ministerial Conference will provide.

In its first meeting after the Berlin Conference, the Follow-up Group is asked to further define the responsibilities of the Board and the tasks of the Secretariat.

Work programme 2003-2005

Ministers ask the Follow-up Group to co-ordinate activities for progress of the Bologna Process as indicated in the themes and actions covered by this Communiqué and report on them in time for the next ministerial meeting in 2005.

Next Conference

Ministers decide to hold the next conference in the city of Bergen (Norway) in May 2005.