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Executive Summary

This E-note provides an immediate report on the main outcomes of the Bologna Process ministerial summit in Leuven and Louvain-La-Neuve on 28-29 April 2009.

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Bologna Process ministerial summit in Leuven and Louvain-La-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009

Introduction

1. This Europe Note (E-Note) reports on the main outcomes of the Bologna Process ministerial summit which took place in Leuven and Louvain-La-Neuve on 28-29 April 2009. It gives background to the Bologna Process and summarises the priorities for future action identified by European ministers for higher education (HE) in the Leuven Communiqué¹.

Background to the Bologna Process

2. The Bologna Process to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 was launched in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration signed by 29 European countries². The overarching objectives of the Process are to facilitate student and staff mobility in Europe and to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education in a global market. Ten action lines were identified to make the EHEA a reality, including:
 - Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
 - Adoption of a system essentially based on three cycles
 - Establishment of a system of credits
 - Promotion of mobility
 - Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance
 - Promotion of the European dimension in HE
 - Focus on lifelong learning
 - Inclusion of higher education institutions (HEIs) and students
 - Promotion of the attractiveness of the EHEA
 - Doctoral studies and the synergy between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA)

¹ The text of the Leuven Communiqué can also be downloaded at:

http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique_April_2009.pdf

² For more information on the Bologna Process please visit: <http://www.bologna2009benelux.org/> The

Europe Unit's website also includes an overview of the Bologna Process:

www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna_process/index.cfm.

3. Ministers from participating countries meet to review progress and set new priorities for action every two years. The Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve summit in April 2009 followed previous meetings in Prague in 2001, Berlin in 2003, Bergen in 2005, and London in 2007. A Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) attended by ministry and stakeholder representatives has steered the Process in between summits.

Outcomes of the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve ministerial summit, 28-29 April 2009

UK delegation

4. Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property and Mr Keith Brown MSP, Minister for Schools and Skills, Scottish Government represented the UK at ministerial level. Professor Rick Trainor, President of Universities UK, attended as a UK HE sector representative and Peter Williams, Chief Executive of the UK Quality Assurance Agency, and Aaron Porter, Vice President (Education), National Union of Students (NUS) also participated as part of the UK delegation³. The UK HE Europe Unit provided all delegates with a copy of the UK HE sector position on Bologna beyond 2010 prior to the summit.

Stocktaking process and implementation of existing action lines

5. The stocktaking exercise uses a colour scheme (green, light green, yellow, orange and red – green being the most complete, red meaning stalled) to show the stage of implementation of Bologna Process reforms. The criteria for the indicators in the 2009 stocktaking exercise⁴ were substantially more demanding than the 2005 and 2007 exercises. As a result, the overall picture for the whole EHEA is not as 'green' in 2009 as in previous reports. From an England, Wales and Northern Ireland perspective, the indicator for the level of international participation in quality assurance has slipped from 'light green' in 2007 to 'orange' in 2009. The indicator for 'stage of implementation' of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has risen from 'orange' in 2007 to 'light green' in 2009. Scotland submitted a separate stocktaking report and is the only country to achieve 'green' in all ten indicators. Overall, the report identifies work to be done across the EHEA in creating national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), embedding learning outcomes in all aspects of HE, and promoting lifelong learning.
6. Ministers agreed that while progress has been made in implementing the existing action lines, there remains much work to be done, particularly in the areas of lifelong learning and student mobility. As a result, no new actions lines were introduced at the summit.

³ The following UK representatives also attended: Mr Alex Young, International Students Team – HE issues, Lifelong Learning Directorate, Scottish Government; and Mr Peter Baldwinson, Student Voice and EU/International, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Mr Paul Bennett, Senior National Official, University and College Lecturers' Union (UCU), attended the summit as part of the Education International (EI) Pan European Structure.

⁴ The Stocktaking Process measures the progress of implementation of Bologna Process reforms in participating countries. The Stocktaking report details progress in assuring quality of education, providing national qualifications frameworks, provision of the Diploma Supplement and the use of a three-cycle system.

http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Stocktaking_report_2009_FINAL.pdf

Social dimension of HE

7. HE Ministers, and the European Students' Union (ESU) in particular, emphasised the social characteristics of HE and the importance of providing equal opportunities to quality education. The Communiqué states: *"This involves improving the learning environment, removing all barriers to study, and creating the appropriate economic conditions for students to be able to benefit from the study opportunities at all levels."* Participating countries are to set measurable targets to be reached by 2020 for widening overall participation in HE, especially those social groups that are currently underrepresented⁵.

Lifelong learning

8. The Communiqué acknowledges the importance of lifelong learning in achieving wider participation targets in HE. It highlights the European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning⁶ as a useful guide for a working partnership between public authorities, HEIs, students and employers to encourage lifelong learning. The Communiqué also places emphasis on learning outcomes as the basis for recognition of formal and informal learning.
9. HEIs were also encouraged to base their ongoing curricular reforms on learning outcomes and the needs of students. *"Student-centred learning requires empowering individual learners, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner in all three cycles"*.
10. There is implicit support for the EU's Tuning programme⁷ in the Communiqué. *"Academics, in close cooperation with student and employer representatives, will continue to develop learning outcomes and international reference points for a growing number of subject areas"*.

Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area

11. The Leuven Communiqué calls upon participating countries to have national qualifications frameworks fully developed by 2012 and prepared for self-certification against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)⁸. In preparation for the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve summit, the QAA led a process to successfully self-certify the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland⁹.

⁵ The UK has a current target of 50% of all 18 to 30-year-olds to participate in HE by 2010. In 2008, the participation rate stood at 40%.

⁶ The Charter was published by the EUA in October 2008,

http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/European_Universities_Charter_on_Lifelong_learning.pdf

⁷ The main aim and objective of the Tuning project is to contribute significantly to the elaboration of 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. <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

⁸ It is an overarching, generic framework with three cycles; generic qualifications descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences and typical credit ranges in the first and second cycles. The full report on the Framework of Qualifications for EHEA can be downloaded at: www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

⁹ http://www.qaa.ac.uk/news/media/pressReleases/FHEQ_27Feb09.asp

Scotland successfully self-certified its national Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions (the Scottish FQHE) against the FQ-EHEA in 2006-07¹⁰. Only Belgium (Flemish community), Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland have also completed this process. The development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) is a complex process and needs to be carried out carefully.

Employability

12. Given the current economic crisis, HE Ministers were keen to highlight the importance of producing HE graduates with the advanced knowledge, skills and competences so that they can *“fully seize the opportunities in changing labour markets.”* However, there was some scepticism from ESU on the role of business and industry in shaping the development of HE courses and curricula, and it argued that this may be perceived as the privatisation or ‘commoditisation’ of HE. HE Ministers encouraged work placements to be embedded in study programmes as well as on-the-job learning.

Mobility

13. The Communiqué sets the challenging target that at least 20% of students graduating in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should have had a study or training period abroad by 2020. This presents a significant challenge not just in terms of encouraging students to go abroad, but also in terms of curriculum design, and data collection. *“Joint degrees and programmes as well as mobility windows shall become more common practice.”* Countries are free to set their own national targets for increasing outward student mobility. Those participating countries that are not EU member states pointed out the difficulties their students experience when trying to study in the EU, and called for a more balanced mobility between Eastern and Western Europe.
14. The important role of teachers in promoting student mobility is also recognised in the Communiqué, as well as the benefits that teachers themselves receive from being mobile. *“Considering that teachers are key players, career structures should be adapted to facilitate mobility of teachers, early stage researchers and other staff”.*

Multidimensional transparency tools

15. This was one of the most contentious issues for those drafting the final Communiqué and it occupied much of the discussion at the actual summit. The UK delegation, ESU, EUA and some other countries argued strongly that the Bologna Process should have no formal role in developing or approving ‘multidimensional transparency tools’, ie typologies/classifications and rankings of HEIs. The final Communiqué reflects these views and highlights that any new transparency tools should be firmly based on existing Bologna Process principles on quality assurance and recognition. HE stakeholders should be consulted in their future development. The Bologna Follow-Up Group is asked to report back on developments in this area in 2012.

¹⁰ Both these reports can be found at: <http://www.enic-naric.net/index.asp?display=qf>

Interaction with other policy areas

16. The Communiqué asks BFUG to liaise with “*experts and policy makers from other fields, such as research, immigration, social security and employment*”. This is due to the belief of some stakeholders that the Bologna Process remit and organisational structure needs to be expanded to include other government ministries and stakeholders in order to tackle issues such as visas, pensions, social security and research.

The future of the European Higher Education Area

17. The BFUG is asked to draw up a work plan up to the 2012 summit and to focus in particular on the following issues:

- measuring and monitoring mobility and the social dimension
- mobility flows between eastern and western Europe
- the future development of multidimensional transparency tools
- better promotion of the Bologna Process outside the EHEA
- recognition of qualifications

The Stocktaking exercise will continue to refine its methodology, and Eurostat, Eurostudent and Eurydice will continue to contribute through relevant data collection.

Bologna Policy Forum – global dimension

18. A Bologna Policy Forum was organised between Ministers of the 46 Bologna countries and representatives from other non-European countries to discuss the global impact of the Bologna Process. The following countries were represented: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Tunisia, and the U.S., as well as the International Association of Universities. The next Bologna Policy Forum will take place in Vienna on 12 March 2010.

Looking to the 2012 Bucharest ministerial summit

19. The Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve ministerial summit accepted Romania’s offer to host the next official ministerial summit in Bucharest on 27-28 April 2012. Prior to that, there will be a celebratory anniversary summit in Budapest and Vienna on 11-12 March 2010.
20. The UK HE Europe Unit will continue to monitor and engage in Bologna Process discussions in the lead-up to the 2012 summit. It will be particularly important for the sector to influence forthcoming discussions on the development and use of qualifications frameworks, multidimensional transparency tools, and the continued use of learning outcomes as the basis for recognition of qualifications. The Unit, working with Bologna Experts¹¹ and other stakeholders, will also continue to support the sector in implementing key Bologna Process reforms, such as the Diploma Supplement.

¹¹ The UK has 14 ‘Bologna Experts’ whose job it is to help inform UK HEIs about the Bologna Process reforms. The experts were appointed by the British Council, in cooperation with UK HE stakeholders, following approval by the European Commission.