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Bologna Process  
Stocktaking Report  
2009

Report from working groups appointed by the  
Bologna Follow-up Group to the  
Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve  
28-29 April 2009

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The report has been funded with support from the European Commission as part of the  
Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE) Programme under the contract number  
516517-2. The content of this report does not represent the views of the Commission or the  
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## Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009: an assessment and review

by Margarita García Sanchis

Rauhvargers, Andrejs; Deane, Cynthia & Pauwels, Wilfried (2009).

*Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009*. Report from working groups appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 28-29 April 2009. 144 pages.

[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Stocktaking\\_report\\_2009\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Stocktaking_report_2009_FINAL.pdf)



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| **Presentation Date:** 20/04/2009

| **Accepted:** 12/05/2009

| **Publication:** 06/07/2009

The *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009* is a document elaborated by working groups included in the Bologna Follow-up Group, and appointed to the Ministerial Conference in Leuven / Lovain-la-Neuve (28-29 April 2009). This report reflects the analysis of the progress that has been made towards achieving the goals that were set by the Ministers at the previous conference, back in London (2007), and is linked to the findings of the previous 2005 and 2007 stocktaking reports.

First of all, the report looks at the development of the action lines in an integrated way, in recognition of the strong interdependence between them. This document not only describes the state of the art of those elements, but also proposes recommendations for the future. Secondly, the report presents a series of individual country scorecards, including ten items which describe the particular position of each country in terms of the action lines previously described. Finally, the document contains a report about the Social Dimension of the Bologna process, since the Ministers requested that the social dimension should be included in the 2009 stocktaking. So that, the main text of the report is divided into five parts:

- Part 1: explains the background to the 2009 stocktaking exercise.
- Part 2: describes the methodology that was used in the 2009 stocktaking and it examines the progress across the various action lines.
- Part 3: includes quantitative and qualitative analysis of the stocktaking results.
- Part 4: includes the scorecards.
- Part 5: contains the report of the Social Dimension Coordination Group.

### **First action line: Degree system**

Most of the countries have almost fully implemented *first and second cycles*, but there are still deficiencies in the implementation of certain regulated professions (e.g. Medicine) and some specific disciplines (e.g. art and music). Anyway, it is only question of time.

There are no obstacles *to access to the next cycle* in legislation. But in practice, in a number of countries, graduates have to meet additional requirements to gain admission to the next cycle.

The implementation of the third cycle is progressing and



the use of ECTS in this cycle is becoming more widespread. However, the authors have identified two different problems: a) there is no single model for the status of doctoral candidates: they may be considered students, early stage researchers or both; b) in some countries, the need to provide doctoral candidates with the transferable skills for employment has not yet been fully understood.

The implementation of *national qualifications frameworks* is not progressing so well. As a matter of fact, only six countries have completed self-certification of their NQF with the EHEA overarching qualification frameworks, and there are still a large number of countries that are just beginning or have not yet started the implementation at institutional level, therefore the full implementation of national qualification frameworks will take some time. Besides, there is still not enough integration between the qualifications framework, the learning outcomes and the ECTS.

Related to *employability*, on one hand there is an urgent need for countries to set up systems to track the employability of graduates in the future. On the other hand, the acceptance of graduates in the labour market varies significantly: countries that have had a bachelor-master system for a long time see no specific problems and some other countries report increasing acceptance of bachelor graduates in the labour market, but there is a third group of countries with no bachelor-master tradition where the labour market seems to completely reject bachelor graduates.

### Second action line: Quality assurance

While the implementation of external quality assurance is proceeding at a rapid pace, development of *internal* quality assurance systems in accordance with European Standard & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) is progressing more slowly. Linking programmes with learning outcomes and designing assessment procedures to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes are the most difficult parts and will take longer to implement. However, the national reports demonstrate that Higher Education Institutions in most countries are actively working to establish coherent internal QA systems and aligning them with the external assessment procedures.

The picture of *external* quality assurance system is more optimistic: all countries have introduced external QA systems including self-assessment and external review; nearly all publish assessment results, and carry out follow-up measures. One-third of the countries have already carried out an external review of their QA agencies and another 22 countries say they have set a date for the review.

The level of *student participation* in quality assurance has progressed, however the analysis showed some gaps in student involvement, i.e. in many cases students are observers rather than full members of the teams, they are not always involved in preparing self-assessment reports, and they are very seldom involved in follow-up measures.

Related to the level of *international participation* in quality assurance, the results show that more international involvement is needed: quality assurance agencies from only 22 countries are full members of ENQA. Given that full

membership of ENQA requires compliance with ESG, this suggests that the standards and guidelines for external quality assurance and the work of QA agencies may not yet be fully implemented in some other countries.

### Third action line: Recognition

The *Diploma Supplement* (DS) is being implemented, but not as widely as would have been expected. Despite the commitment to issuing the DS to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language by 2005, only half of the countries have managed to implement it fully by 2009.

The analysis of the National Action Plans on Recognition shows that the interpretation of main principles of the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* (1: namely applicants' right to fair assessment; 2: recognition if no substantial differences can be proven; 3: demonstration of substantial differences where recognition is not granted), as well as recognition procedures and even the terminology used in different countries, differ enormously. In conclusion, there is a long way to go before there is a coherent approach to recognition of qualifications within the EHEA.

Surprisingly, although ECTS has been part of the Bologna Process since 1999, it is still not fully implemented. ECTS credits are widely used for both accumulation and transfer, but there are two main challenges: measuring credits in terms of student workload and linking them with learning outcomes.

While a small number of countries have quite advanced systems for the *recognition of prior learning*, many other countries have little or no recognition of learning undertaken outside the formal education system. And, which is worst, there has not been much progress since 2007.

### Social dimension of the European Higher Education Area

All countries have taken some action in order to enhance participation, but only a minority of them has set up monitoring systems for measuring progress on the issue. Still fewer countries show evidence of an integrated strategy with synergies between social policy, government action and institutional practice. And there is still a long way before the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels will reflect the diversity of populations in the EHEA.

National approaches to the social dimension are not yet successfully integrated with qualifications frameworks, strategies for lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning, flexible learning paths and support for mobility. There are not yet sufficient data about the social dimension and mobility. The Eurostat and Eurostudent report is a first step in closing the information gap about participation rates and educational attainment levels in each country.

### Conclusions

This is a very interesting document, with an up-to-date vision of the Bologna process. This report gives us a global picture of the state of the art all around the EHEA. Maybe we could ask for more details about the specific situation of each country, but, anyway, the analysis presented is com-

plete and relevant. The information showed is very well organized, including graphics and tables, very intuitive and easy to read, and the report also includes an executive summary which synthesizes the results obtained.

**| How to cite this article:**

García Sanchis, Margarita (2009). Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009: an assessment and review. *@tic. revista d'innovació educativa*. [Reading Room] (nº 2) <http://ojs.uv.es/index.php/attic/article/view/> Date of consultation, dd/mm/aa