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Focus on higher education in Europe 2010: New report on the impact of the Bologna Process

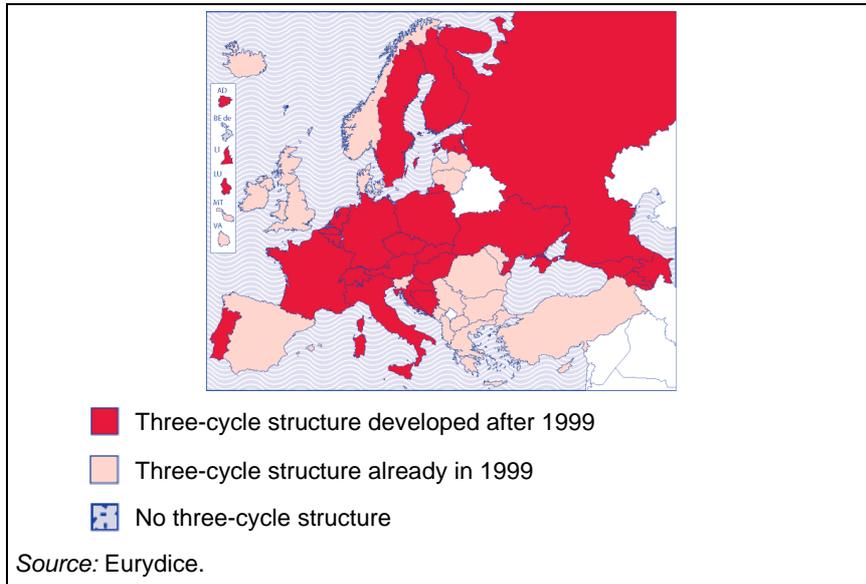
A new report, produced for the European Commission by the Eurydice network presents an overview of the progress on higher education reform made in the 46 countries in the Bologna Process. It is based on authoritative evidence from each country, and provides a clear comparative view of how the issues have been addressed at national level.

On the occasion of the official launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the overall picture reveals that the Bologna Process has brought about fundamental and dramatic change in higher education structures across Europe. The growth of external quality assurance in higher education has been one of the most notable features of the past decade.

Yet, as European higher education is dynamic and evolving in a fast-changing context, new challenges are inevitably emerging. In particular, the combination of an expanding participation in higher education, today at historically unprecedented levels, the implementation of system reforms and the stagnation of public funding is creating enormous pressure on the higher education sector. The need to intensify co-operation at European level is becoming ever more acute, with improved monitoring mechanisms being essential to assess the societal impact of ongoing reforms.

Widespread implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure

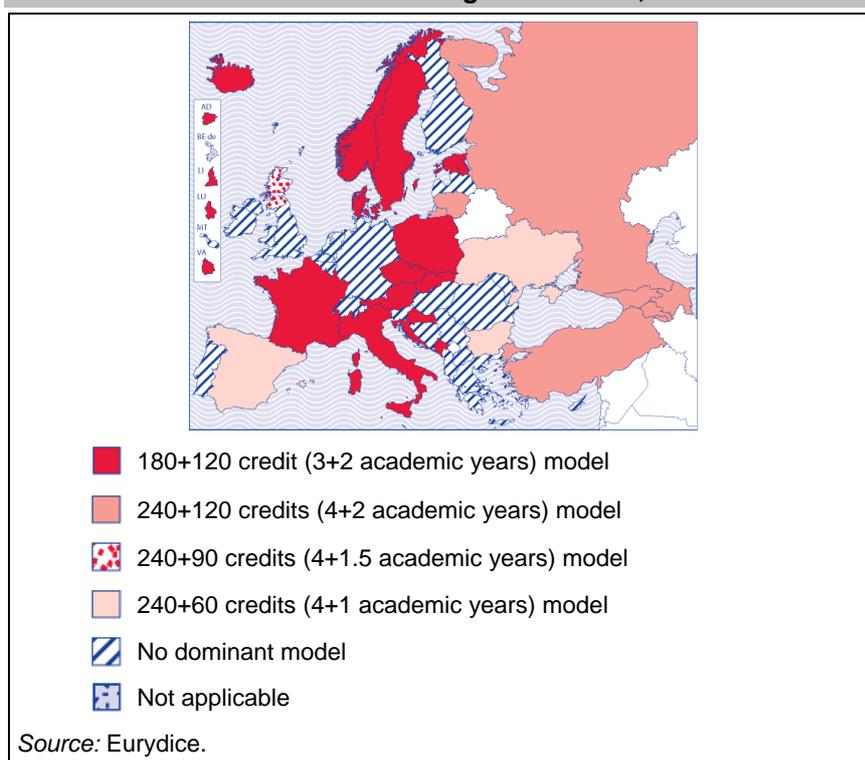
Three-cycle structure in 1999 and 2009



At this stage of the Bologna Process, the new three-cycle structure is either fully in place or has at least been extensively introduced in all countries. However, several study fields, particularly regulated professions such as medicine and related fields, remain outside these new structures in nearly all countries.

Looking at the combination of first and second cycle programmes, the 180 + 120 ECTS credit (for information on ECTS, see Bologna Tools below) two-cycle structure is the most commonly adopted model. It is the most prominent model in 16 countries and is also used in a further 21 countries where no unique model is established.

Overall Bologna structure model implemented in the most common programmes in the Bologna countries, 2009/10



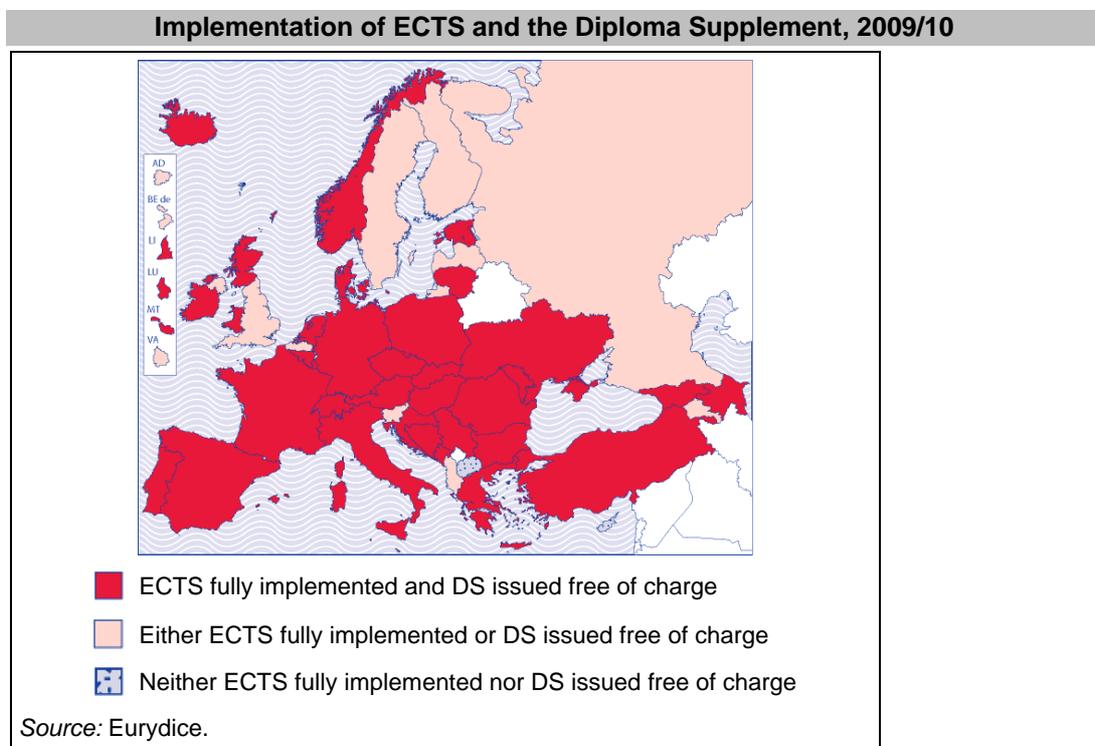
Vocational and professional higher education in the Bologna Process

The inclusion of vocational and professional education in the Bologna Process is a source of significant divergence and some confusion across Europe. The reasons for this lie in the many different national understandings of 'professional' or 'vocational' programmes, and the blurring of distinctions between academic and professional programmes in some countries, as the higher education world focuses more consciously on employability concerns and on providing relevant education for the labour market.

The Bologna tools: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and Diploma Supplement (DS)

Two long established elements of the 'Bologna toolkit' are the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement (DS). ECTS is a student-centred credit system, initially developed to facilitate mobility in the Erasmus programme, and is based on the student workload required to achieve defined learning outcomes. The Diploma Supplement is a document attached to a higher education diploma that describes the nature, level, content and status of the studies successfully completed.

A large majority (34 signatory states) fully implement the two instruments in their higher education systems. Among the 12 countries that have fully implemented only one of the two tools, all but Turkey have implemented the Diploma Supplement whereas ECTS implementation still lags behind. Overall this widespread use indicates that these two instruments have played an important role in embedding aspects of the Bologna reforms and facilitating the understanding of national higher education systems.



National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)

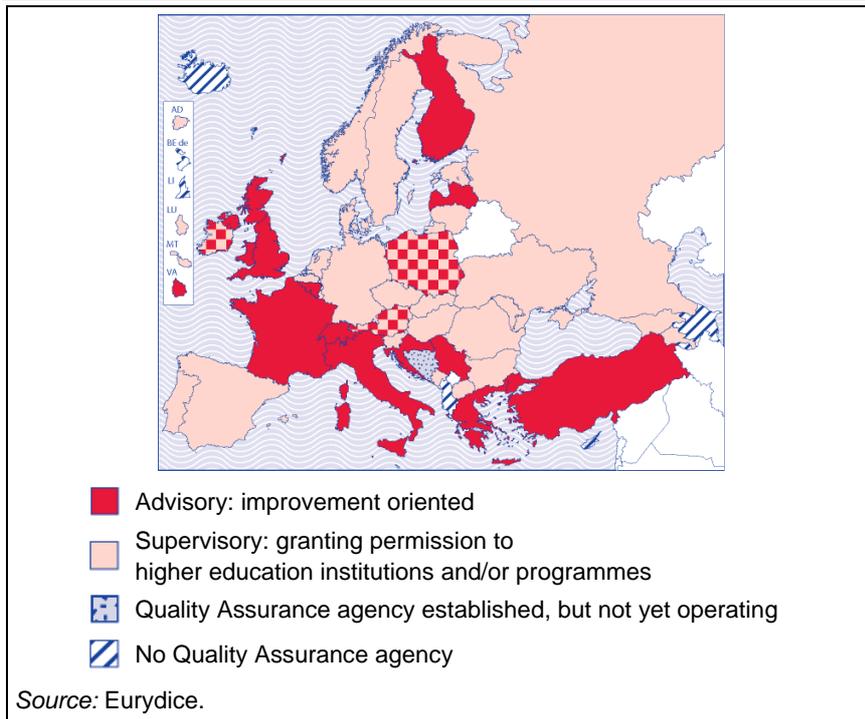
The third tool to have been introduced and developed in the Bologna Process is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It is a tool for describing and clearly expressing the differences between qualifications in all cycles and levels of education. Eight higher education systems now have a fully self-certified NQF, while 11 are well advanced in the process of implementation. The other countries/regions are still in the preparatory stages of defining purposes and structures. On first sight this picture may not seem too promising, but since the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009, Denmark and Malta have self-certified their NQF and several countries have all made significant progress towards establishing their own NQF.

Quality assurance

The growth of external quality assurance in higher education has been one of the most notable features of the Bologna decade. European cooperation in quality assurance is exemplified by agreement on European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) now including 17 agencies.

In the majority of EHEA countries, quality assurance is concerned with granting permission to higher education institutions or programmes to operate on the basis of threshold quality standards. Only a minority of countries exclusively follow an improvement-oriented approach.

Main approach to quality assurance 2009/10



Student mobility

Student mobility has been an over-arching goal of the Bologna Process since its inception, and the drive to promote mobility has been consistent throughout the last decade. However, despite its importance in the European Higher Education Area, student mobility is rarely a topic that is addressed comprehensively at national level, and information on the reality of student mobility is rarely complete.

European policy and programme developments have been an extremely important catalyst for national action on student mobility. While most countries have some financial measures in place to support student mobility, the economic disparity between countries in the European Higher Education Area creates major problems for the less wealthy countries and citizens. Despite the ministerial agreement of a target that 20 % of graduates should have experienced a study or training period abroad by 2020, few countries have adopted this goal as a part of a national higher education strategy.

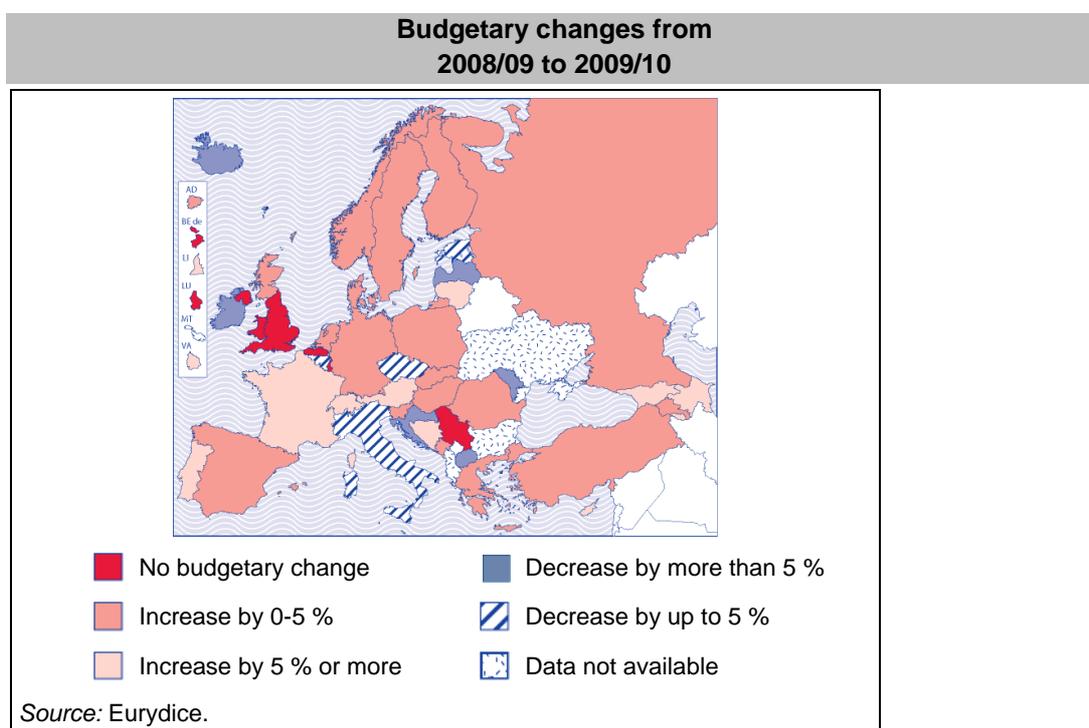
The social dimension and lifelong learning in higher education

The social dimension of higher education presents a significant challenge to European cooperation as it is understood so differently from one country to another. At this stage, very few countries have linked their policy on the social dimension to the Bologna commitment of raising the participation of under-represented groups to the point where the higher education population mirrors the overall societal distribution.

The term 'lifelong learning' is also still understood in many different ways across the European Higher Education Area. Lifelong learning has become a recognised mission of higher education institutions during the Bologna decade, but nevertheless remains a peripheral concern in many countries. Information on the funding of lifelong learning is difficult to obtain, partly as a result of lack of conceptual clarity and partly because diverse funding sources are involved. Where information on public funding is available, investment in lifelong learning appears to be relatively low.

The impact of the economic crisis

The Bologna decade has seen no improvement in overall higher education funding. However, initial national responses to the economic crisis have taken radically different paths – from increased investment in higher education through stimulus packages, to severe cuts in higher education expenditure. The likely impact of these different policy approaches on the European Higher Education Area is at this stage difficult to discern.



Economic crisis has also had an impact on enrolment rates, staffing and infrastructure issues, and the continued development of lifelong learning. The nature of this impact has not been uniform across countries.

Through their responses to the crisis, governments have in general demonstrated that they are aware of the social importance of higher education and have neither reduced student support nor scaled back enrolment in the higher education system. However, understanding the impact of economic changes on higher education requires more systematic monitoring.

The full study ***Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process*** is available in French and English

on the Eurydice website: www.eurydice.org

on the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency website: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/index_en.htm

Printed copies of the study in English and French will be available from April 2010. The German translation will be available shortly afterwards.

Other key documents of interest:

- Key Data on Higher Education – 2007 edition
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=088EN>
- Focus on the structure of higher education in Europe. National trends in the Bologna Process – 2006/07 edition
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=086EN>
- Higher Education Governance in Europe. Policies, structures, funding and academic staff - 2008
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=091EN>
- Bologna secretariat website
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>
- European Commission: Higher education
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc62_en.htm

Background information on the Eurydice network

The Eurydice network supports the development of European cooperation and national policies in education by providing information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. It consists of 35 national units based in all 31 countries participating in the EU Lifelong Learning programme (27 Member States, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland, as members of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Turkey) and a central coordinating unit based in the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels. It produces regular studies on various aspects of European education systems and provides detailed descriptions of the systems in each participating country.

www.Eurydice.org