Degrees, Curricula and Qualifications in the Bologna Process: Some results from an assessment of 46 European higher education systems

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Independent Assessment

- 2009 Independent Assessment on impact of Bologna Process, focused on national implementation

- But what does it tell us about the effect of Bologna on learners?
  - Here, we re-interpret some findings from the study from the perspective of their effects on students

- What we know is still massively outweighed by what we don’t know
What are Bologna’s objectives?

**General objectives**

- Creation of a EHEA that is attractive, competitive and equitable and with a high level of mobility of students, researchers and staff

**Operational objectives**

- To establish compatible and comparable HE
- To enhance quality in European HE
- To develop more flexible and accessible HE that is open to all and supports lifelong learning

**Specific objectives**

- To improve recognition of programmes and qualifications
- To increase cooperation in QA and improve comparability of criteria and methods
- To improve the flexibility of learning pathways and establish student-centred learning
- To implement mechanisms to improve take-up of HE by under-represented groups

**Measures**

- Mobility support packages*
- 3-cycle degree structure
- DS
- ECTS
- QF
- QA procedures
- Short cycle studies
- Modules
- Electives
- RPL
- Student support measures
- Non-traditional time and place of study; distance learning

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*Mobility support packages: mobility support packages are designed to facilitate the movement of students between institutions within and outside the EU, providing financial support to students to cover costs such as travel, accommodation, and childcare.
Main impact indicator: International mobility

Findings
- Major rise in degree mobility within EHEA
- Yet, a tiny % of students benefit from mobility
- Much greater increase in mobility from outside, to EHEA
- Major variations between countries: significant east-west difference; success of individual countries’ policies

Issues
- Lack of data on systematic mobility data for EHEA, differentiated by credit and degree mobility, both programme and free movers
- Quality of mobility: recognition of credits, degrees → QF-EHEA
Degree Reform

Findings

- Since 1999 over 1/3 of countries have put in place completely new degree structures
- 2/3 have been going through various degrees and types of reform
- 3+2 years (180+120 credits) most common, but various models are used (from 3+1 to 4+2, … several per country …)
- Total of 300 ECTS is neither a norm, nor common practice
- In 6 systems, less than 50% of students were enrolled in ‘new-style’ programmes in 2008

Issues

- To what degree do students use new flexibilities?
  - mobility Bachelor → Masters (fields; national + international)
  - labour market entry with Bachelor
  - LLL Masters etc.
Compatibility, comparability and recognition – ECTS

Findings
- All HE systems now use ECTS or a comparable system in broad scale, or are in transition towards it
- But six systems use it in less than 75% of non-doctoral programmes
- 12 systems use both student workload and learning outcomes, 13 use neither

Issues
- Should workload or learning outcomes be pre-eminent?
- Does ECTS really serve student mobility? How are different module sizes, approaches, contents and levels dealt with?
- How is the student experience affected by different approaches? What actually are student preferences?
Flexible pathways

Findings
- Area suffers from under-conceptualisation: unclear which measures included and useful, not in focus of reforms
- Regarding short-cycle degrees, modules and electives, patchy picture:
  - short-cycle degrees exist in 26 countries
  - in 13 systems, 90%+ of study programmes are modularised
  - 21 systems typically have 25%+ electives in a programme

Issues
- Under-conceptualisation → clearer goal formulation
- To what extent have measures actually facilitated flexibility, what (other) measures are needed?
Compatibility and Recognition

Findings

- See mobility: recognition is not ‘easy’
  - Note: recognition should never become ‘automatic’!
- Degree reform was not enough to achieve compatible degrees
- Nor was cooperation among quality assurance agencies
- Hope is now that qualifications frameworks will bring compatible standards of learning outcomes
  - EHEA/EU frameworks → national → discipline → study programme

Issues

- Qualifications frameworks are abstract; will they be connected to the reality of education in different disciplines, at different cycles’ levels?
- Can Tuning be a useful example of ‘bottom-up’ involvement of academics? ([http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/](http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/))
Conclusions

- Qualifications frameworks are crucial to make Bologna a success

- Large variation in Bologna-related reforms since 1999
  - Bologna was effective if connected to national reform agendas
  - National reform agendas changed interpretation of ‘Bologna’
  - Often, other reforms were called ‘Bologna’ to overcome resistance—which led to more resistance in some countries

- Overall, most national laws and regulations are in place
  - Implementation by higher education institutions of national frameworks introduces another layer of interpretation, leading to more diversity
  - More diversity within systems, but maybe less so across systems?
  - Available data mean we know much more about formal (legal) changes than about real changes affecting students
Thank you for your attention

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