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## REFORM! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe

Wagenaar, Robert

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# REFORM !

## TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe

A Blueprint for Student-  
Centred Learning



Robert Wagenaar

# **REFORM !**

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### **A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning**

Robert Wagenaar



This is a publication of the International Tuning Academy based at the University of Deusto, Bilbao and the University of Groningen.

Tuning Academy website: <http://www.tuningacademy.org>

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## Preliminary remarks and acknowledgements

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This book is based on some 30 years of reflection on the role of higher education in society and experience in internationalisation of higher education in Europe and beyond. To understand my personal interest and involvement in the topic discussed in this book, I am providing some background information. In early 1988, I took the initiative as managing director of the Department of History of the University of Groningen, to establish a placement office and to appoint a full-time placement officer for History students. There were two main reasons for this: to show the merits of academic studies in the Humanities to the world of work, but most of all it was motivated by the difficulties of History graduates in particular to find employment at the appropriate level. The university board supported the initiative and initially made the necessary funds available. However, on second thoughts it needed the reserved funds for another, more urgent, matter. Instead, a placement office was established at the level of the Faculty of Arts, which included the Department of History, in the autumn of the same year. It was one of the first in the Netherlands.

As a sort of compensation for not getting a placement office and officer specifically for the History department, the University of Groningen authorities asked me whether I would have an interest in being involved in a new initiative taken by the European Commission for a six-year pilot project to develop a European Community Course Credit Transfer System, abbreviated as ECTS. If so, it would propose me as the representative for History, one of the five disciplinary groups in the pilot. In December 1988, I received a phone call from Fritz Dalichow, an official of the Erasmus Bureau – the policy implementing agency of the higher education division of the European Commission – who was responsible for supporting this initiative. He invited me to be the chair of the History group. The group would consist of 16 universities, represented by a disciplinary representative and an institutional representative. Three years later this group was extended with another 11 higher education institutions. Thus, more or less by coincidence, I became – as the ECTS subject area coordinator for History- part of the European internationalisation agenda for higher education.

After the termination of the ECTS Pilot Scheme in 1995, the Commission invited me to become a member of a small group of experts to help higher education institutions in the European Community to implement ECTS. This initial group of counsellors would grow over time, involving experts from all the European Community, later European Union, countries. From 1995, the ECTS Histo-

ry group continued its activities both focusing on content – by setting up a Curriculum Development project to enhance the European dimension in History programmes – and in terms of student mobility, which had also been part of the ECTS Pilot Scheme. After ten years, I handed over my role as coordinator/president to Ann Katherine Isaacs of the University of Pisa, who succeeded to make the subject area of History part of a new EU initiative: the SOCRATES Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs). These were large-scale networks of universities intended to contribute to reform and enhance degree programmes in the involved academic fields by sharing expertise.

These experiences are the main reason and explanation why Julia González, involved in the ECTS Pilot Scheme from 1991 as the representative of the Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, and an ECTS counsellor of the first hour, and myself took the initiative to develop in 2000 a new project for the modernisation of higher education qualifications, which became *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*. This project was a response from the higher education sector – in particular its grass-root level – to the 1999 Bologna Declaration of the Ministers of Education of 29 European countries. This book results from this initiative, and intends to document it by positioning it in the context of the Bologna Process and the development of ECTS, which partly preceded the Process.

However, this book would and could never have been written without the hundreds of higher education institutions and thousands of academics that signed up to the many Tuning projects in Europe and beyond. Innovations and reforms are usually the work of committed and entrepreneurial individuals, and this also applies to the higher education sector. The Tuning initiative brought together such individuals, many of whom played a central role in defining and developing ECTS as a transfer system in the last decade of the previous century and after the millennium they took a leading role in Tuning. The group was extended with disciplinary experts, some of whom would become the coordinators of subject area groups. The experts involved in Tuning came from all over the European Union, making it a high level international endeavour. One can only be very grateful for the dedication these experts have shown over time to higher education reform, and to Tuning in particular. Many of them are still active in Tuning related initiatives today.

During the last 30 years, I had the opportunity and honour to talk about and discuss higher education with hundreds of experts working for or in the higher education sector. I refer here to international organisations, institutions and networks, such as the European Commission from which Angelika Verli, David Coyne, Peter van der Hijden and Adam Tyson stand out, the Council of Europe, the OECD, the European University Association, in particular Lesley Wilson, Michael Hörig, Michael Gaebel and more recently Tia Loukkala, ENQA, EURASHE, ENIC-NARIC, in particular Jenneke Lokhoff and Bas Wegewijs, the

European university networks, especially the Coimbra Group and UNICA. I am thankful for discussing with these organisations represented by their staff members complicated issues in all openness in which real insights in higher education related matters, but also deep commitment to the sector was showed. In particular, I remember with great joy the many Friday afternoon discussions I had with Peter van der Hijden, who became a friend over time, over the phone about Bologna, ECTS and Tuning related matters. Peter also commented on the first four chapters of this study for which I am very grateful. It is widely acknowledged that, as a proactive Commission official, he has been instrumental developing the structures we have today at the European level for making higher education more comparative and comparable. Having worked at a University himself, he understood and understands the present day challenges and needs of the individual higher education institutions and their academic and supporting staffs and students.

I am also very grateful to the many discussions I have had with national governmental authorities, in particular those from the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom and representatives from many national rectors' conferences. Especially my discussions with the very dynamic Marlies Leegwater, the Dutch representative in the Bologna Follow-up Group for the first 15 years and initiator of the Joint Quality Initiative that resulted in the so-called Dublin Descriptors, were very helpful in getting a good understanding of the position of national authorities in general regarding the Bologna Process and the modernisation of higher education.

Very stimulating also have been the lively discussions with the ECTS colleagues, later Bologna promoters/experts, from all European Union, candidate countries and associated countries, and in particular the Dutch, Flemish, Italian and Spanish teams.

Special thanks I owe to my comrades in arms, the members of the Tuning core team, of which many were also involved in the development of ECTS. In alphabetic order they are: Stephen Adam, Tim Birtwistle, Volker Gehmlich, Julia González, Ann Katherine Isaacs, Katerina Galanaki-Spiliotopolous, Raimonda Markeviciene, John Reilly, Margret Schermutzki, Maria Sticchi-Damiani, plus in their role as Tuning subject area coordinator: Constantin Spiridonidis (Architecture), Truus Ophuysen (Art and Design), Themis Veleni (Art History), Volker Gemlich and Peder Ostergaard (Business Administration), Terence Mitchell and Anthony Smith (Chemistry), Lars Ebert (Dance and Theatre), Estela Pereira and Paul Ryan (Earth Sciences), Arlene Gilpin and Maria Sticchi-Damiani (Education), Michael Newman (European Studies), Ann Katherine Isaacs and Jean-Luc Lamboley (History), Vita Fortunati (Literary Studies), Catrin Rhys (Linguistics), Alan Hegarty and Stephen Adam (Mathematics), Jeremy Cox (Music), Mary Gobbi and Heiki Pekkarinen (Nursing) and Hendrik Ferdinande and Luigi F. Donà Dalle

Rose (Physics), Nikolaos Maghioros (Theology and Religious Studies), and in their role of Tuning-CALOHEE subject area coordinators: Alfredo Soeiro and Alfredo Squarzoni (Civil Engineering), Gudmundur Halfdanarson and Ann Katherine Isaacs (History), Mary Gobbi and Marja Kaunonen (Nursing), Fernando Cornet and Ornella Pantano (Physics) and Julia González and Maria Yarosh (Teacher Education).

And then there is the International Tuning Academy, established at the Universities of Deusto and Groningen, as a result of the many Tuning projects that have been organized globally since the start of the present millennium. It is remarkable how stable this team has proven to be. Without this team, consisting of Pablo Beneitone, Ivan Dyukarev, Sara Goitia, Julia González, Oscar González, Maria Ortiz-Coronado, Edurne Bartolomé, Margarethe Macke, Maida Marty, Boladji Omer Oke Ahodeou, Anna Silvius, Ingrid van der Meer and Maria Yarosh, Tuning would not be what it is today. It has been and is a real pleasure to work with them so closely, in particular with Pablo Beneitone, who is the co-director of the International Tuning Academy and responsible for the Bilbao branch, since the retirement of Julia González, who is still involved as special advisor in all the Tuning activities. The Tuning family took the initiative to establish its own scholarly publication in the *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* in 2013, which is Scopus Indexed since 2018. It found highly professional and committed editors in Paul Ryan, who was succeeded by Luigi F. Donà Dalle Rose and Anna Serbati as co-editor and supported by Ladislav Bizimana as its managing editor. The Journal has been instrumental as a platform for original worldwide scholarly contributions reflecting creative thinking and original approaches and ideas, which were helpful in preparing this study.

In general, the many, many talks, discussions, reflections with all those mentioned – and many more – have been fundamental to develop my own ideas about the necessity of the internationalization of higher education and the modernisation/ reform of higher education systems, structures and the organization and content of degree programmes. Although I do not want to diminish the importance of the ideas and suggestions brought forward by all involved in developing ECTS, the Bologna Process and Tuning, one person has been very special to me: Julia González. She is probably the most creative thinker I have met in my life. Our endless stream of discussions has been fundamental for developing Tuning in the first place, but also for giving it direction in the now nearly twenty years following its start in the autumn of 2000. However, there is another crucial sparring partner that should be highlighted; Ingrid van der Meer, my Tuning colleague and friend at the University of Groningen since the summer of 2001 involved as project manager. Ingrid has shared not only her critical observations about Tuning, but also has been instrumental in preparing the many applications for the European Commission to obtain the funding for Tuning and

other related projects. But most of all, I am extremely grateful to her for checking all I have written in the Tuning context, including this book, taking out mistakes, adding crucial information and turning it into proper English. One cannot wish for a better colleague. Thankful I am also to Hanneke de Vries for composing the register of this book.

First my many ECTS activities, followed by the Tuning ones, all executed next to my regular occupations over time, have imposed a heavy burden on my family life. Homer and Wester from birth had to deal with a father who was working most evenings and on weekends and was often abroad. As a result they were highly dependent on their mother Janny. The three of them never complained, aware as they were that in particular my Tuning activities were probably dearer to me than my regular occupations. One cannot wish for better family members. Being all acquainted with university life, in particular since Homer and Wester went to university, their observations and experiences about real life situations in a variety of universities in the Netherlands and abroad have been very helpful in focusing my ideas. Having Janny as my partner, a university professor who operates successfully internationally herself, has certainly been a bonus in this respect.

All the above has been of key importance to give direction to the choices made for the study presented here, for the content of which I am solely responsible. In addition, I am grateful to Dirk Jan Wolffram, Doeko Bosscher, Herman Hoen, Peter Maassen and Pavel Zgaga for reading and commenting on the manuscript. Their remarks and suggestions have enhanced the text.

Finally, I am thankful to the Board of the Faculty of Arts (Gerry Wakker and Dirk Jan Wolffram) and the Board of University of Groningen (Elmer Sterken and Sibrand Poppema), not only for establishing the International Tuning Academy as an educational and research centre at the University of Groningen, but also for facilitating the writing of this book.



## Introduction

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On 24-25 May 2018 the Ministers of Education met in Paris for their already 8<sup>th</sup> Follow-Up Conference of the Bologna Process, a major European reform initiative. As in the case of the seven preceding Conferences, this one, resulted in adopting a Communiqué, of which the text was the outcome of about six months of intense discussion between all directly involved. In this Paris Communiqué the Ministers express their satisfaction of what has been established in two decades of policy making. In their wording: ‘We are proud of what the Bologna Process has achieved’. It speaks of agreed goals and policies, shaping the landscape, large-scale student mobility, improved comparability and transparency of systems and increased quality and understanding, and mutual trust. Stressed in the text is the dialogue between the political level and the implementation level – that is the higher education sector and its institutions. It refers to defending fundamental values, and of ‘developing policies that encourage and support higher education institutions to fulfil their social responsibility and contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive society through enhancing intercultural understanding, civic engagement and ethical awareness, as well as ensuring equitable access to higher education’. The Ministers also show self-critical awareness by stating that progress in implementing the Bologna Process remains uneven, both between policy areas and countries. New is the focus on innovations in teaching and learning and on the required pedagogical training of staff. The text is intended to be inspirational and meant as a blue print for innovation and the implementation of additional reforms.<sup>1</sup>

The study presented here concerns the modernisation process of higher education in Europe in the last three decades, covering the development of the European Credit Transfer System since 1989 which prepared the ground for the Bologna Process ten years later. The latter has drawn worldwide attention; not only from policy makers, the media and the informed public, but also from scholars with a variety of academic backgrounds, in particular higher education (policy) studies, European studies, international relations and political sciences. This has resulted in a still fast growing number of scholarly articles, monographs and edited volumes, covering many aspects. The topics discussed in these publications can roughly be divided into six groups: (1) more general overviews of

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<sup>1</sup> Paris Communiqué, Paris, May 25th 2018. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101765/ministerial-conference-paris-2018.html>

the Bologna Process<sup>2</sup>, (2) (possible) challenges and implications of the Process for other world regions<sup>3</sup>, (3) the legal framework of the Process as well as European policy and national sovereignty issues<sup>4</sup>, (4) the relation of the Bologna Process and the EU Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and its (possible) effects on the (autonomy) of higher education institutions<sup>5</sup>, (5) the governance aspects of the

<sup>2</sup> A short overview of the more formal part of the Bologna Process is offered by: David Crosier and Tedora Parveva, *The Bologna Process: Its impact in Europe and Beyond*. Paris: UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning, 2013. See also: Jeroen Huisman, Clifford Adelman, Chuo-Chun Hsieh, Farshid Shams and Stephen Wilkins, Europe's Bologna Process and the Impact of Global Education, in: Darla Deardorff, Hans de Wit, John D. Heyl and Tony Adams, *The Sage Handbook on International Higher Education*. Los Angeles, etc.: Sage, 2012, pp. 81-100. The publication also offers short overviews ('windows') about the reception in other world regions.

A more recent description of the Bologna Process is presented by Joseph M. Piro, *Revolutionizing Global Higher Education Policy Innovation and the Bologna Process*. New York and London: Routledge, 2016.

More comprehensive are the US-publications: Paul L. Gaston, *The Challenge of Bologna. What the United States Higher Education Has to Learn From Europe, and Why It Matters That We Learn It*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing LLC., 2010; Cliff Adelman, *The Bologna Club. What U.S. higher education can learn from a decade of European reconstruction*. Washington DC, 2008; Cliff Adelman, *The Bologna Process for U.S. eyes: Re-learning higher education in the age of convergence*. Washington DC, 2009. One of the recent informed European publications in this respect is: Christina Sin, Amélia Veiga and Alberto Amaral, *European Policy Implementation and Higher Education. Analysing the Bologna Process*. Issues in Higher Education series. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016 which debates the fulfillment of the major objectives of the Bologna objectives so far.

<sup>3</sup> Besides the publications of Gaston and Adelman for example: Laurel S. Terry, The Bologna Process and Its Impact in Europe: It's So Much More than Degree Changes, in: *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*. Vol 41, 2008, 107-228. For Latin America see for example: Jocelyne Gacel-Avila, The impact of the Bologna Process on higher education in Latin America, in: *Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education, Revista de Universidad y Sociedad del Conocimiento (RUSC)*. Vol 8. No.2, pp. 285-296.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Sacha Garben, The Bologna Process: From a European Law Perspective, in: *European Law Journal* 16 (2), 2010, pp. 186-210; Sacha Garben, *EU Higher Education Law. The Bologna Process and Harmonization by Stealth*, Alphen aan de Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 2011. Building on the work by Garben and others is Anne C. van Wageningen, The Legal Constitution of Higher Education Policy and Governance of the European Union, in: Jeroen Huisman, Harry de Boer, David D. Dill and Manuel Souto-Otero, eds., *The Palgrave International Handbook of Higher Education Policy and Governance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 95-113. See also: A. Gideon, *Higher Education Institutions in the EU: Between Competition and Public Service*. The Hague: Springer Verlag, T.M.C. Asser Press, 2017. A very recent publication analyzing the relations between the supra-national, national and institutional levels is: Cristina Sin, Orlando Tavares, Sónia Cardosa and Maria J. Rosa, eds., *European Higher Education and the Internal Market. Tensions Between European Policy and National Sovereignty*. Issues in Higher Education series. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Ruth Keeling, The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: the European Commission's expanding role in higher education discourse, in: *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006, pp. 203-223; Sacha Garben, The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy: Commercialisation of Higher Education through the back door?, in: *Croatian Yearbook of European Law and Policy*. Vol. 6, 2010: Retrieved from: <http://www.cyelp.com/index.php/cyelp/article/view/110/76>



Process<sup>6</sup> and (6) the more theoretical as well as detailed studies analysing aspects of or countries involved in the Bologna Process<sup>7</sup>. All six topics are discussed in this study when relevant for its narrative.

The perspective taken in this study is that of higher education institutions and their management and academic staff. This allows for offering an entirely new perspective, because the focus of the bulk of publications so far has been only or mainly on higher governance levels, and far less on the lower levels, that is the challenges met by the development and implementation of reforms at grass-root level. This study distinguishes five different governance levels and aligns them: the European, national, university, faculty or school and the departmental/ degree level, that is the group of academics offering a programme of studies. The European and national levels also involve the role of international and national organisations and relevant stakeholder organisations, such as the European University Association (EUA) and national Rectors' Conferences. As a result, the study ranges from high level governance to the actual assessment of students, offering an in-depth historical and analytical overview from policy making to actual policy implementation. This type of study does not yet exist and it fills an identified need.

This brings us to the methodology applied in this study as well as the theoretical frameworks used as the backbone of this study. The study, applying the heuristic/ historical-critical method, is about critically analysing political processes and the actual implementation of those, as well as on identifying the evidence of realisation or lack of it. However, it intends to do more. In the study also strategies and applications are presented and discussed to make policies outlined at ministerial level in the framework of the Bologna Process a reality. This implies a combination of a top-down and a bottom-up approach. In conceptual terms the

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. Robert Harmsen, *The Bologna Process and New Modes of Governance: Logics and Limits of Arena-shaping*. Paper prepared for the EUSA Thirteenth Biennial Conference. Baltimore, 2013. Retrieved from <https://orbilu.uni.lu/bitstream/10993/12170/1/Harmsen-Bologna%20Process.pdf>; Paul Furlong, *The Bologna Process: Informal Governance in the Wider Europe*. Paper presented at the UACES Annual Conference, Cambridge, 5 September 2011. Retrieved from <http://uaces.org/documents/papers/1101/furlong.pdf>; Ase Gornitzka, *The Open Method of Coordination as practice – A watershed in European education policy?* Working paper No. 16. ARENA, Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, December 2006; Cecile Hoareau, *Deliberative governance in the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna process as a case of alternative governance architecture in Europe*, in: *Journal of European Public Policy*. Volume 19, Issue 4, 2012; See also the publications listed in footnote 9.

<sup>7</sup> Many aspects of the Bologna Process are discussed, in: Adrian Curaj, Peter Scott, Lazăr Vlasceanu and Lesley Wilson, eds., *European Higher Education at the Crossroads. Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms*. Printed in 2 Parts. Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York: Springer, 2012. See also the recent studies of: Eva Maria Vögtle, *Higher Education Policy Convergence and the Bologna Process. A Cross-National Study*. Houndshills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Isabelle Sieh, *Der Bologna-Prozess in Frankreich und Deutschland im Vergleich*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014.

study is built on two axes, that of the application of the governance models identified and used by key entities and that of the type of approaches used in relation to the decision-making processes as well as their implementation. The theoretical concepts and approaches are applied in two ways: as the governance framework to steer the process, and as a conceptual model to check the effectiveness of the framework in reality. They are used as supporting instruments to analyse actions and behaviour of the actors involved. The study, being first of all a historical one, does not have the intention and/or ambition to develop an overall theoretical and methodological framework to implement an empirical model to analyse the complexities of the governance and policy relationships of higher education among the five governance levels identified over time. This would require a different type of study, which would belong to the realm of political sciences and higher education policy studies with their own scholarly apparatus for analysing political processes.<sup>8</sup> Those readers who have a particular interest in the many dimensions of the governance aspects of the modernisation process are referred to a number of successive edited volumes, which offer insight in the development of its discourse over time.<sup>9</sup>

In the setting of the process of the reform of the higher education sector and its individual degree programmes the main players each made different choices regarding the governance models and approaches required. The ministers and their representatives opted for the so-called Open Method of Coordination, a form of intergovernmental policy-making meant to create a common understanding of problems and to help to build consensus on solutions and their practical implementation. It suited the approach embraced at a very early stage of the Bologna Process, that of ‘convergence’ as a means for effective policy making.

In addition to the initiative of the ministers of education, there was another: the project *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, which was launched in the autumn of 2000. It was a grass-root initiative by a group of universities, which obtained the support of the European Commission. Its aim was to in-

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<sup>8</sup> See in this respect the scholarly work done by Peter Maassen, Johan P. Olsen, Alberto Amaral, Guy Neave, Christine Musselin, Åse Gornitzka and others.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Maassen and Johan P. Olsen, eds., *University Dynamics and European Integration*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007; Catherine Paradeise, Emanuela Reale, Ivar Bleiklie, Ewan Ferlie, eds., *University Governance: Western European Comparative Perspectives*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2009; Alberto Amaral, Guy Neave, Christine Musselin, Peter Maassen, eds., *European Integration and the Governance of Higher Education and Research*. Dordrecht, etc.: Springer, 2009. Alberto Amaral, Christine Musselin, Ivar Bleiklie, eds., *From Governance to Identity: A Festschrift for Mary Henkel*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2010; Christine Musselin, and Pedro N. Teixeira, eds., *Reforming Higher Education. Public Policy Design and Implementation*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014; Cristina Sin, Amélia Veiga and Alberto Amaral, *European Policy Implementation and Higher Education. Analysing the Bologna Process*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

volve higher education institutions and their academics directly into the Bologna Process, using the argument that policy-making would be followed by implementation. Implementation was thought to be the prime responsibility of the higher education world. The initiators of Tuning, having a different perspective than the ministers and their staffs, developed a distinct understanding of running the process successfully. A decade of developing ECTS had taught them that reforms such as the introduction of a European credit system implied cooperation and alignment of different levels of policy and decision making, above and within higher education institutions. These perceptions required a multi-layered and multi-actor approach. At the time, the multi-level governance model as a means to analyse EU policy making was still in the making.

Tuning operated from the very start on the basis of a multi-governance and multi-actor model to give a voice to all levels of policy making and – most of all – policy implementation relevant for the modernisation process. It distinguished the higher education ‘system level’ for which ‘harmonisation’ was thought most appropriate and the higher education ‘structural’ level – that is individual degree programmes – which it thought required (policy) conversion. Harmonisation, to make higher education programmes in Europe comparable and compatible. Convergence of degree programmes to facilitate recognition. In the Tuning context, the notion of convergence would also be used as a means to reform, that is to make higher education programmes more tailored to the needs of society, in particular to improve the chances of graduates to find employment matching the level of education. This besides preparing them for active citizenship, fully respecting the aim of higher education to form experts in a particular field and to facilitate the joy of learning in itself.

In this study the applied governance models and approaches are outlined and put in context by comparing them to other (related) (theoretical) models and approaches. This implies in practice that the model of the Open Method of Coordination is compared in its effectiveness to the theoretical frameworks/models of multi-level and multi-actor governance and new institutionalism. The concepts of ‘harmonisation’ and ‘policy convergence’, used in the context of the Bologna Process, are discussed in relation to the wider spectrum of cross-national-policy diffusion, policy transfer and policy convergence, harmonisation theory, and unification. Offering this overview of concepts, related directly to the context of higher education, does not only give insight into the different options and choices that were and could have been made, but – as stipulated before – also allows for analysing, evaluating and deciding whether they were the most appropriate ones.

Given the type of study and the topic covered this implies it is interdisciplinarity of character. It combines the academic fields of contemporary history and

governance studies and quantitative and qualitative survey research, plus education sciences.

The study starts with outlining the aims and objectives of the Bologna Process, preceded by the Sorbonne Declaration, from 1998 until 2018, by identifying the needs of the different actors involved and the policies and strategies developed. It offers also insight in developments and initiatives preceding the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations, that is the role of the ERASMUS programme and in particular its related European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. It also includes a reality check on those policies through a survey initiated based on a two-pillar approach of quantitative and qualitative instruments. The second half of the study is focussing on the actual implementation processes at higher education institution and grass-root level, that is the actual degree programmes. For this purpose, the already mentioned project *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* was launched in 2000, by some 100 selected universities and co-financed by the European Commission. Tuning turned into a process over time. In 2016 it developed further with the launch of the project *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe (CALOHEE)*, which was meant to offer new and better models and incentives for reform.

This study means to find answers to a number of related questions. The central question raised and answered in this study is what initiated higher education reform, and what were the driving forces behind both the Bologna Process and the Tuning initiative. This overarching question is broken down in more tailored ones. Why was it thought necessary to initiate a policy to reform higher education systems, structures and approaches? What conditions were required for the process to be effective and were these (sufficiently) acknowledged and met in practice? Was there clarity about the key players in the process, their roles and responsibilities in terms of policy making and implementation? What are the outcomes of the process so far and do these meet the original expectations? And lastly, what might a successful integrated model of modernisation of higher education systems, structures and degree programmes look like, and which then are the constituent core elements to be taken into account. These questions are raised and answered in the different chapters of this book. Including the one what does a student-centred model of higher education imply for all involved and where are we presently in implementing this approach.

As stated, the perspective taken in this study is that of the higher education institutions and their staffs to analyse the process. This implies a focus on the contribution of Tuning to offer a feasible model for (actually) realising the intended reforms. From 2004, Tuning has developed into a global phenomenon. Full-fledged projects have been implemented all over the world, covering at present some 130 countries and all continents. Tuning is arguably the largest initiative

by far for higher educational reform in the world.<sup>10</sup> End 2018 the total number of visitors of the Tuning project websites was more than 12.5 million.<sup>11</sup>

Except Tuning USA, which was initiated by the Lumina Foundation for Education, based in Indianapolis, all projects and studies have been organised by the Universities of Groningen and Deusto, Bilbao. Since 2013, this is done in the setting of the International Tuning Academy, a common initiative of these two institutions. The Tuning projects have been co-financed by the European Commission on the basis of competitive open calls or tender procedures.

Gradually over the last twenty years, it has been acknowledged that the reform agenda for higher education requires a paradigm shift by moving from an expert-driven model towards a student-centred model: what should the learner know and be able to do after being awarded a qualification? Since 2009 this shift has become the main driver of the Bologna Process. In addition to the questions raised above, and looking in particular at the lower levels of decision making, is this paradigm shift actually taking place at higher education institutional and grass-root level, that is the day-to-day teaching and learning practice? Which are the success factors and obstacles and challenges?

In the last decades the 'playground' of higher education has changed fundamentally. Massification, Globalization and Information and Communication Technology have given a serious push to its internationalization. The required level of quality and effectiveness of higher education programmes are no longer determined at local or national level only, but today are also referenced internationally. This has and should have consequences for the governing system applied. From its very start Tuning has distinguished the involvement of five levels to make reforms a reality. As said, it introduced and applied a multi-level governance philosophy, before it had been defined as a conceptual framework. It identified not only levels which should be aligned in the policy making and implementation process but also the different actors and stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities. For the Bologna Process the Bologna Follow-up Group was set up, representing national governments at an international level, but also included as a formal member the European Commission and as *consultative members* and key stakeholders, the European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB)/European Student Union (ESU) and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), named the E4, and the Council of Europe. The E4, not having any executive power, were expected to represent the national Rectors' Conferences of the research intensive universi-

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<sup>10</sup> International Tuning Academy website: <http://tuningacademy.org/?lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe: 4.75 million; Tuning América Latina/Latin America: 5.7 million; Tuning Russia: 1.5 million; International Tuning Academy: 550.000.

ties as well as the universities of applied sciences, the national student unions and organisations and the national quality assurance organisations at European level. The national governments in turn were supposed – on a voluntary basis – to line up with their national educational sector. Within the higher education institutions no roles and responsibilities were defined for the different actors, staff and students. This explains why Tuning took up the challenge. Tuning developed over time (at least until 2009) a strong relationship with the different actors at the five levels identified.

Although the agenda for reform was set and the international structure for policy making was created, it did not imply that the majority of academic staff in most European countries and beyond realized to the full that the playground was indeed changing. One can observe a striking difference – a disconnect – between perceptions of governmental authorities, management of higher education institutions, its faculties and departments and academic leaders on the one hand and the typical academic and student on the other. One can also see differences in perceptions of what international based education actually implies between different European countries and between world regions. Nevertheless, whether one likes it or not, in particular for the more renowned institutions, in every country competition in terms of attracting academic staff, young researchers/ PhD-students and master and bachelor students has moved from the national to the international arena. Academics and students identify and select higher institutions that serve their interests best. Due to search engines, portals, web presentations, and social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn and the like, this application process of academic staff and students has become a global one.

As a result, the student but also the academic staff body has changed in a large and growing number of institutions as has often – if only partly – the language of instruction (mostly) to English. As institutions and academics are noticing, students have become more demanding with regard to the content of educational programmes and the learning and teaching process. Not only because they have a wider and easier accessible choice of institutions, but also information about their teaching staff, degree programmes and its course units can easily be found online and exchanged by using social media. This also applies to the quality of education that is offered. At present, there is more focus on this issue than ever before. Universities develop so-called quality cultures as a result of external pressure in particular. A key question is in this respect what and who decides what high quality programmes are, and on which basis in terms of reliable evidence?

Besides what is mentioned above, and besides personal development and the pure joy of learning, there is another dimension which has a growing impact on the content, implementation and modes of delivery of a higher education programme: its relevance for society. Relevance is understood here in terms of

preparing for civic, social and cultural engagement and for employability. In particular employability seems to be given more and more weight and is therefore competing with the actual interests and abilities of the student. This is understandable in a situation where an economic global crisis has impacted so many, but it might lead to wrong choices, possibly followed by a growing number of drop-outs. There is an obvious responsibility for all involved. For the higher education institutions, in offering programmes for which a societal need must have been identified. For students, to choose degree programmes which fit their interests and abilities. Offering irrelevant programmes (content wise) or making the wrong choice of programme can be a costly affair in more than merely a financial sense. Although the chances for obtaining employment at a suitable level after graduation for one programme might be better than for another, this does not imply that less successful programmes in this respect do not have an obligation regarding the transition to society of their graduates. Degree programmes are also not intended to mirror the academic profiles of the teaching staff itself in today's dynamic world. Education is simply not intended to be 'art for the sake of art'. This has implications for the design and delivery of programmes as well as for the competences which are developed and the intended learning outcomes. Although preparing for the labour market is an important feature of education, as an important condition to enjoy a pleasant life, there is the other role higher education institutions have claimed to have, namely to prepare its students for active citizenship. This is a rather challenging topic in a globalising world which is connected by real time information through a growing range of formal and personalised media. What does this imply and do universities really give substance to this aspect in higher education?

The many issues and questions raised above – all related – will be discussed in ten chapters and are concluded with an overarching conclusion, which refers back to the introduction as well as to the chapters. Each chapter starts with an abstract and ends with a conclusion and can therefore be read as independent papers. The first four chapters are meant to set the required context in historical and theoretical terms, covering the Bologna Process and preceding European Commission policies, in particular the launch and development of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System being a crucial factor. The chapters 6 and 7 lean heavily on the final reports published as a result of the first two phases of the EU Tuning project (2001-2002 and 2003-2004), but also cover the discussions and reflections since. During the years 2001-2004 Tuning developed its methodology which is still applied today.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project – Phase One*. Bilbao and Groningen, 2003; Julia González and Robert Wagenaar,

The chapters 1 and 2 focus on intergovernmental initiatives which are reflected in two declarations, the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) and the subsequent Bologna Declaration (1999). In the first chapter, *Reforming higher education national systems in a European context, the Bologna Process introduced: harmonisation or convergence?*, the ins and outs of the launch of what will become a Process are described and analysed as an initiative that was mostly inspired by national interests.

Chapter 1 also includes an overview of different theoretical concepts and frameworks, approached from the perspective of public policies analysis covering in particular cross-national-policy diffusion, policy transfer and policy convergence as well as harmonisation theory. These concepts are used to understand the context of the two Declarations. Should the two declarations be perceived as a bold initiative to harmonise the different national higher education system to arrive at a European Higher Education Area, or was the ambition limited to reach convergence, a far less ambitious objective? In this chapter also the many initiatives of the European Union taken in particular in the 1990s are reviewed in this context, reaching from policy papers to concrete action programmes, which served in practice as the foundation for the intergovernmental process.

Chapter 2, *The Bologna Process on the March towards a European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Success or Failure?* outlines the implementation process including the governance structure applied. It also addresses some models thought to be relevant for understanding the topic of this study, taking these from political science and public administration theory, focussing on the implementation of government policies. One should think in this respect of governing models and/or theoretical frameworks of multi-level governance and multi-actor governance, 'the Open Method of Coordination' and new institutionalism. As was already mentioned the Bologna Process opted for the Open Method of Coordination, a governance model taken from the Lisbon Strategy. This Strategy was an initiative of the European Council of leaders of the EU member states to give the EU a serious boost by turning Europe into a knowledge-based society. It resulted in formal European Commission membership of the Bologna Process from 2001 on. As is explained in this chapter the first ten years of the Process were used to develop and to promote the use of instruments for harmonisation of national systems. In 2009 the agenda was broadened to the realm of teaching, learning and assessment, by choosing the paradigm of student-centred learning for the implementation of reforms at the level of the higher education institutions. It was also the moment the image of success started to fade.

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eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao and Groningen, 2005.



Chapter 3, *Working towards the credit. Creating a stable basis for comparison and compatibility in a globalizing world. Myth or Reality?* offers a detailed history of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System, abbreviated as ECTS from 1988 until 2000. It was the ECTS experience that triggered Tuning, but was also of relevance for the Sorbonne initiative. Therefore, to understand the modernisation process in general and the Tuning initiative in particular, the development of ECTS is thought highly relevant in the setting of this book. Insight is offered in the features, structures and tools developed for a student workload based transfer system which were defined in a 6 years Pilot Scheme phase involving in the end 145 higher education institutions. The project ECTS started from scratch and involved a rather small group of people. There was no serious experience available for developing a credit transfer system based on workload at the time.

In chapter 4, *Making the Jump. From a European credit transfer system towards an overarching accumulation system*, outlines how one of the responsibilities taken-up by the Tuning project in 2000 was implemented: the transformation of the European Credit Transfer System into a European credit transfer and accumulation system. Credit accumulation is defined as the process of collecting credit for learning towards a qualification. The change implied a revision of its key features. This was thought necessary to make ECTS a key component for developing the Tuning methodology of reform. Explained in this chapter is what was required to turn ECTS into an accumulation system and how it was accepted as the pan-European credit system. One of the innovations was to link student workload to the achievement of learning phrased in terms of competences to be obtained. Credit should only be given when the intended level of competence – expressed as learning outcomes – would be met. Another one was turning ECTS into a planning instrument for developing high quality and feasible degree programmes. A tremendous stimulus was the inclusion of the European credit system as a means for harmonisation/ convergence in both the Sorbonne and Bologna Declaration. Nowadays, the 48 countries that have signed up to the Bologna Declaration value it as a key instrument for reforming higher education programmes, referring to the student-centred approach. The vast majority of Bologna signatory countries have by now made it their national credit system.

Chapter 5, *Competences and learning outcomes: A panacea for understanding the (new) role of Higher Education?* has been published earlier in the Scopus indexed *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* in a volume devoted to competence-based learning (May 2014). It has been revised and updated for the purpose of this book. It argues that the competence and learning outcomes approach is becoming dominant in today's higher education. It offers the context for this development as well as the background to base the Tuning approach on this concept, which was rather new at the turn of the millennium. In particular at-

tention is given to the concept of competences, distinguishing subject specific and generic ones as a Tuning innovation and a core element of its approach. Innovative is also the alignment of competences and learning outcomes, with the latter being the level indicators of the former.

Chapter 6, *Output versus input. From an expert-driven approach towards a student-centred model of Higher Education: Policy and approach?* offers an introduction to the project *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* which was a direct response to the Bologna Process from the academic world at grass-root level. As is outlined in this chapter the initiative came from the group of counsellors, appointed by the European Commission to facilitate the introduction of a European Credit Transfer System. It obtained the strong backing of the European Commission. The initiators developed the idea that a multi-level governance structure involving lower levels responsible for the actual implementation of reforms, would be a requirement for success. These should be aligned with the higher policy making levels, nationally and internationally. In the chapter its governance model and actors model is presented and explained. How did Tuning think to contribute significantly to the reform process of higher education, boost the quality of performance and to make higher education programmes more accountable to society? Did its initiative pay off? To find common ground the concept of convergence theory was identified and applied, backed by an open dialogue between academics to develop a methodology. This methodology would have two basic elements: an approach to reform higher education programmes and the formulation of internationally agreed reference points or benchmarks for initially seven and gradually many more subject areas.

In chapter 7 *Higher Education professional staff development and the Tuning approach: strategies for designing academic programmes* the Tuning methodology, based on the paradigm of the student-centred approach, is outlined. Its basic concept is to prepare students best for their future role in society, both in terms of preparing for appropriate employment and to engage in society. It is shown that the core of its model is made-up of (cycle) level descriptors, degree programme profiles (every degree should be unique), the concepts of learning outcomes/competences, the role of student workload and mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement. In other words, it describes and explains the toolbox every higher education teacher requires to operate successfully in a student-centred environment meant to stimulate active learning. And be able to contribute – as a team effort – to the design and delivery of high quality degree programmes relevant for society.

Chapter 8, *A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning outcomes based approach in the EU*, is a revision of an article published in the *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* (May 2016). The article in turn is based on a report for the European Commission. Both result from a study to find evidence

concerning the use of the student-centred approach based on the use of the concept of competences and learning outcomes. It can also be seen as an impact study of the Tuning initiative in higher education institutions in particular at grass-root level. In 2010 the need was felt to find out whether the intended modernisation of learning was actually taking place. For this purpose a robust two-pillar evaluation instrument was developed consisting of a quantitative (stakeholder surveys) and a qualitative dimension (in-depth interviews). The outcomes of this research is presented in this chapter.

Chapter 9, *Columbus' Egg? Qualifications Frameworks, Sectoral Profiles and Degree Programme Profiles in Higher Education*, was originally published as an article in the very first volume of the *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* (November 2013), which had the title 'New profiles for new societies'. It has been updated in the context of this book. It explains the importance of having frameworks at meta, macro and micro level for curriculum design, quality assurance and recognition. It shows the relation between the Tuning Reference points and its cycle level descriptors and those of two overarching frameworks of descriptors to identify level: the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (Dublin Descriptors) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. This chapter argues that an intermediate level between the meta level and the subject area level should be created. This is the Tuning sectoral (qualifications) reference framework. As part of this framework it introduces the notion of 'dimensions', which organise the core competences identified for a particular sector or discipline. This approach is used to align the Tuning subject area reference frameworks with the two European ones, which are merged into one. This is thought necessary to obtain a feasible structure which facilitates the use of reference frameworks in practice. It also allows for distinguishing sub-levels within cycles, a topic ECTS struggled with for a long time.

Chapter 10, *Developing a new strategy for defining and measuring what is needed: Agreeing common ground*, is the final step in developing a more effective strategy to boost reforms, resulting from frustration that the modernisation of higher education programmes proved to be a very slow process with many hick ups. The reason for this was thought to be insufficient alignment of the different qualifications frameworks, the European overarching frameworks and those at sectoral and subject area level. But there were more reasons to make a new step, which can be defined as revolutionary. From its launch Tuning had promoted the idea that learning should be relevant in two directions: preparing effectively for the world of work and preparing for citizenship. In practice, it had to note that its reference points and tools missed precision. It also needed better incentives to motivate academic staff to reform their programmes by offering better tools. Building on the disappointing experience of the OECD feasibility study *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes* (AHELO), in close cooperation

with the European Commission and support of Educational Testing Service (ETS), Tuning set up the project *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe* (CALOHEE) (2016-2018). The project developed comprehensive and easy to read up-to-date subject area based qualifications reference frameworks for five subject areas reflecting as many academic sectors. These frameworks are the perfect reference to define high quality, suitability and relevant higher education learning. In conjunction the project has developed a multi-dimensional assessment instrument as well as a model to develop articulated assessment reference frameworks at subject area level, which should serve as a reference for high level degree programmes and as a basis for implementing comparative assessments in an (inter)national context to find out whether degree programmes are up to standards and meet the needs of society.

The overall conclusion, finally, serves as a means not only to answer the questions defined in this introduction, but also to connect the different topics discussed in the ten chapters of this book.

# 1. Reforming Higher Education National Systems in a European Context. The Bologna Process Introduced: Harmonisation or Convergence?

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## ABSTRACT

*At the end of the 1990s the reform process of higher education in Europe gets a serious boost. The trigger does not come from inside the university world but from politicians, although the occasion is the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sorbonne University in 1998. For different reasons, the four ministers of (higher) education of the EU countries representing the largest educational systems feel the need to outline a 'roadmap' for the reform of the higher education sector: the Sorbonne Declaration, 'a Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system'. Their signatures are strongly inspired by national interests. Other European Union (EU) countries, the European Commission but also the university world feel surprised and outflanked by this initiative. A year of intensive consultation follows, culminating in a Declaration, signed in 1999 by 29 ministers from the European Union, the EU candidate and EEA countries, at the oldest university of Europe, Bologna. This Bologna Declaration, which in general confirms the ideas expressed in the Sorbonne Declaration, starts a process of modernisation of the higher education sector that continues until this day. Both declarations build on decades of work established by international organisations in particular the European Commission. With the exception of the proposal of the introduction of a two cycle system to organise higher education studies effectively – allowing to define a competitive European Higher Education Area (EHEA) – it does not contain any elements not already developed and discussed. To the disappointment – even anger – of European Commission officials the countries involved decide to organise their initiative outside the realm of the European Union and to involve main stakeholder organisations in the field of higher education.*

## Introduction

*The New York Times* informs the U.S. public on 12 January 2003 about the Bologna Process in a two-page article including photos published in its Education Life supplement of its most read Sunday edition. The headline of the article: “The New E.U. A revolution is shaking up European universities. The objective: a united education system. How else to overthrow the U.S.?” The lead of the article matches its header:

“For a college founded in 1614, the University of Groningen in the northern Netherlands is surprisingly open to change. This fall, it divided its five-year undergraduate program into separate bachelor’s and master’s degrees. It will soon adopt a new European credits system. And its recruiters are busy wooing young Asians and Eastern Europeans to do their postgraduate studies – in English naturally – in this friendly medieval city. But what is happening is Groningen is merely a harbinger of a revolution that is beginning to shake up institutions of higher education across Europe, a revolution that includes a clarion call to compete with the United States for a larger share of the increasingly globalized education market”.

The article explains why universities have ‘to turn their back on tradition in the name of European integration’ to ‘make European education more appealing to foreign students’. The wide group of interviewed experts from different countries, stress the need and willingness for reforming the sector to create a European Higher Education Area, and thus boosting transnational recognition of degrees and employability. Their tune is an optimistic one, noticing general consensus, although also stipulating that concerns have been expressed about the threat to university autonomy and of commercialism.

The reason for picking out the University of Groningen as the angle of the article is the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project, in short Tuning, initiated some two years earlier. It is a response of a group of renowned European universities and their academics, to the Bologna Process, which is supported politically and financially by the European Commission. The project is co-coordinated by the Universities of Groningen and Deusto, Bilbao, Spain. The role of Tuning is highlighted in the article as part of the process: ‘for the changes to become reality, more than persuasion will be necessary. One crucial step involves defining what knowledge and skills are necessary if degrees from universities with different academic cultures are to be compared’.

The author of the article is Alan Riding, a journalist of repute, at the time the European cultural correspondent of *The New York Times*, based in Paris. The request for writing the article comes from the editorial office in New York, that has picked-up the issue in the autumn of 2002. When handing in a first draft, he is asked to identify informed critics of the Process, to balance the article better.<sup>13</sup> They prove not easy to find, which reflects the mood of the time well. As a result, the original draft is not substantially adjusted.

It would take another five years before the Bologna Process receives serious attention in the USA. This was the direct outcome of addressing ‘Bologna’ at

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<sup>13</sup> Riding asked the author of this book to advise him on critical voices, after having received the comment from the editorial desk.

national conferences from 2006 and scholarly contributions from 2008.<sup>14</sup> The driving force in this respect was the Lumina Foundation for Education, based in Indianapolis, which entrusted two eminent scholars to study the Process, Cliff Adelman and Paul L. Gaston. This resulted in a number of high quality in-depth analyses<sup>15</sup>, which competed with the publication of Laurel S. Terry of Penn State, who used her Fulbright Scholarship in Germany to prepare the comprehensive article ‘The Bologna Process and Its Impact in Europe: It’s So Much More than Degree Changes’.<sup>16</sup> All authors offered ample attention to Tuning and praise its contribution to the Process although it was not part of the intergovernmental governing structure. It is interesting to note that these comprehensive publications of the first decade of the Bologna Process have been written by academics from another continent. The US was not the only country that was interested in the European efforts to reform its higher education sector. In all world regions it was drawing attention, not in the least in Europe itself; not only from policy makers, the media and the informed public, but also from scholars with a variety of academic backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

The Bologna Declaration, its forerunner the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998 and the follow-up process initially were perceived as “revolutionary” initiatives to align the different higher education systems in Europe. Revolutionary in two

<sup>14</sup> Jeroen Huisman, et al., The Bologna process and its impact in the European Higher Education Area and beyond, in: *The SAGE Handbook*. Thousand Oaks, 2012, 81-100. The authors report that only the online World Education News and Reports (WENR) carries some articles before these conferences, not the wider read *Chronicle for Higher Education* and on-line *Inside HigherEd*.

<sup>15</sup> Clifford Adelman, *Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, May 2008. 117 pp.; Clifford Adelman, *The Bologna Process for U.S. eyes: Re-learning higher education in the age of convergence*. Washington DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, April 2009; Paul L. Gaston, *The Challenge of Bologna. What United States Higher Education Has to Learn From Europe, and Why It Matters That We Learn It*. Sterling: Stylus Publishing, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Laurel S. Terry, The Bologna Process and Its Impact in Europe: It’s So Much More than Degree Changes, in: *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*. Vol 41, 2008, 107-228. It is a follow-up of the article published on year earlier: Laurel S. Terry, The Bologna Process and Its Implications for U.S. Legal Education, in: *Journal for Legal Education*, Volume 57, Number 2 (June 2007), 237-252. Also Terry stipulates not much attention has been given to the Bologna Process so far, page 111 and note 4.

<sup>17</sup> Pavel Zgaga, *Looking out: The Bologna Process in a Global Setting On the “External Dimension” of the Bologna Process*. Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, s.a. (2007); See for scholarly contributions, e.g.: Susan L. Robertson, *The Bologna Process Goes Global: A Model, Market, Mobility, Brain Power or State Building Strategy?* Invitational paper to ANPED’s Annual Conference, October 2008, Brazil; Frances Espinoza Figueroa, European Influences in Chilean and Mexican Higher Education. The Bologna Process and the Tuning Project, in: *European Education*, vol. 40, No. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 63-77; Hugo Aboites, Latin American universities and the Bologna Process: from communication to the Tuning competencies project, in: *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. 8:3, pp. 443-455.

ways: given its scope and objectives and because it was organised outside the formal framework of the European Union. As a result, it drew much attention from scholars specialized in particular in higher education (policy) studies, political sciences, European Studies, international relations and European law. Their contributions led to a nearly endless stream of publications by European and non-European authors and scholars. Does this imply that most has been said about the topic? It does not at all – on the contrary. Although having undoubtedly meaning as such, the value of many of these publications has its limitations because they were produced very closely to the actual events, not allowing for much distance and reflection to the topics discussed. This is in particular true for many of the papers produced in the first years of what became the Bologna Process. Two decades have passed since the signing of the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declaration which offer more space for analysing choices made and impact resulted.

The main question answered in this chapter is what triggered the process for reform and why and how did it obtain attention in a rather short time span, involving both European Union and candidate countries.

## Fighting elephants

The combination of countries that signed the Sorbonne Declaration was not a coincidence. They had their own reasons to accept the invitation for a two-day Forum (24-25 May 1998) entitled *Towards a European University*, to celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sorbonne University, which was hosted by the French minister of education Claude Allègre, and brought together more than 2000 academics and policy makers from all over Europe in the grand amphitheatre of the Sorbonne Palace.<sup>18</sup> Besides Allègre, the ministers of education Tessa Blackstone (United Kingdom), Jürgen Rüttgers (Germany) and Luigi Berlinguer (Italy), had in common that they represented the largest educational higher education systems in Europe, but also that they seriously struggled to finance their systems, which had to service growing number of students. Public spending on higher education had clearly reached its limits at the end of the last century. Three out of the four countries, France, Italy and Germany, had to deal with quite inefficient systems. Not only were the dropout rates in these countries high to very high, so was the time that students required to finish their studies. The situation was

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<sup>18</sup> Jane Marshall, FRANCE: Sorbonne Declaration – Precursor to Bologna, in: *University World News*. Issue No:19, 9 March 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20080306110346629>. See also Jürgen Schriewer, “Rationalized Myths” in European Higher Education. The construction and Diffusion of the Bologna Model, in: *European Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Summer 2009, 34.



different for the UK having based its system on selection for enrolment. When Labour minister Blackstone was asked, what her motivation was to sign the Declaration, her response was that it did no harm, would show a constructive attitude, and the Anglo-Saxon model might serve as a model for other countries. This was only partly true, because she also had national interests in mind when agreeing to come to Paris, and she wanted to keep an eye on developments. Her main concern was the competitive position of UK higher education globally, in particular towards the US, and with UK universities increasingly becoming dependent on tuition fees from overseas students.<sup>19</sup> Under parliamentary discussion was the Dearing Report, published mid-1997, that aimed to strengthen the higher education sector for the future and in which the re-structuring of undergraduate tuition fees for UK students was a central element in relation to expansion and maintaining standards. The outcome was the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (enacted on 16 July) which introduced a basic yearly fee of 1000 GBP.<sup>20</sup> Another key issue was to defend the three-year bachelor and the one-year master degree.<sup>21</sup> This was not exactly the structure Allègre had in mind, although he did not push the point.

What were the problems the signatory countries had to face in more detail besides the ones mentioned above? France had to deal with a very complicated structure of which the main feature was the co-existence of a university sector based on the model of 2 (DEUG)+1 (License)+1 (Maitrise) + 1 (DEA or DESS) years, and the system of Grandes Écoles of 5 interrelated years. These operated simul-

<sup>19</sup> Pauline Ravinet, The Sorbonne meeting and declaration: Actors, shared vision and Europeanisation, in: *The Bologna Process and the Shaping of the Future Knowledge Societies: Conference Report from the Third Conference on Knowledge and Politics*, the University of Bergen, May 18 – 20th 2005, 187-204. Retrieved from <http://eurodocs.sciences-po.fr/en/conference/2005/rafinet.pdf>. Last accessed on 20 November 2017.

According to UNESCO data the relative importance of overseas students grow in the UK from 6.8% in 1985 to 11.6% in 1995. For Australia these percentages are 4.3 and 14.8% respectively and for the US 2.8% and 3.1%. In 1995 the USA was by far the largest destination for overseas students, accounting for 30%. However, it seemed at the time, based on the most recent figures of 1996 and 1997, that in the UK the grow was turning into stabilization even a slight reduction. See: Paul Bennell with Terry Pearce, *The International of Higher Education: Exporting Education to Developing and Transitional Economies*. Institute of Development Studies Working Paper 75. Brighton: University of Sussex, 1998. Retrieved on 4 June 2018 from: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/wp75.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Baroness Blackstone: 'I want a world-class system of higher education'. Labour's former Higher Education Minister explains where she thinks Michael Gove is going wrong, in: *Independent*, Thursday 6 October 2011: "The £1,000-a-year fee then was means-tested and poor students didn't pay anything", she adds. "The £3,000-a-year top-up fee was also very different." Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher/baroness-blackstone-i-want-a-world-class-system-of-higher-education-2366029.html>. See for the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998: [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/30/pdfs/ukpga\\_19980030\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/30/pdfs/ukpga_19980030_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Johanna K. Witte, *Change of Degrees and Degrees of Change Comparing adaptations of European Higher Education Systems in the context of the Bologna Process*. Enschede, 2006, 329-330.

taneously. Allègre wished to bridge this dichotomy of the two structures which had different missions. This would not be an easy task given the opposition to be expected from the worlds of both universities and Grandes Écoles, and would imply fighting vested interests. To overcome this double structure, he suggested a model of 3 + 2 years according to 'the existence of the international standard', based on an advice of a special advisory committee, chaired by the renowned Jacques Attali.

This advice was still in the making when the Sorbonne Forum was prepared. In the Sorbonne Declaration this educational structure would be expressed in the terms 'first cycle' and 'second cycle' – French vocabulary – without linking these to a scheduled number of academic years, because that was not in the interest of the UK.<sup>22</sup> The Sorbonne Declaration argument was used to pass new legislation in France and to introduce a new umbrella grade, the *Mastaire* in 1999, covering both the DEA/DESS degrees (which until then were perceived as the third cycle and License and Maitrise together were seen as the second cycle), but also that of the diplomas of the Grandes Écoles. This allowed for introducing the License as a clearly defined first degree and the *Mastaire* as the second degree. Both were intended to be exit levels, a point stipulated in the Sorbonne Declaration as well. This should be a major step forward, because until their introduction, the existing DEUG, License and Maitrise – based on pure knowledge acquisition – were not perceived as a serious preparation for the labour market outside the public sector. In the past, this had led to a patchwork of more professional degrees at all levels. In response to and as part of the new legislation, a new national degree was introduced, the *license professionnelle*, offering the same entry rights as the traditional license, offering better preparation for the labour market but also bridging short cycle (IUT) degrees (2 years) and university degrees.<sup>23</sup>

This new structure should make the French higher education system more attractive. As part of his reform initiative Allègre also initiated the establishment of an agency, called EduFrance (following the examples of DAAD, British Council and NUFFIC) to promote the sector internationally, which was realized in November 1998. This fitted well in one of the underlying reasons for initiating the Sorbonne Declaration that is concerns expressed about the lack of competitiveness of the different European higher education systems in a globalizing

<sup>22</sup> Misunderstandings raised in this respect from the Attali report, summoned by Allègre, which was titled 'Pour un modèle européen d'enseignement supérieur' ('For a European model of higher education') and was published more or less at the same time as the Sorbonne Declaration, but focusing on the French system only. It proposed a 3-5-8 system reflecting cumulative number of academic years scheduled for obtaining a bachelor, master and doctoral degree (first, second and third cycle). At the time there was no support for such a European broad architecture.

For the report see: <http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/984000840.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Johanna K. Witte, *Change of Degrees and Degrees of Change*, 260 and 275-278.

market. Guy Haug, in analysing the Declaration in the first Trends Report states explicitly that this aspect received little attention in the public debate at the time but “if read together with the proceedings of the Sorbonne seminar, the Declaration could easily be interpreted as a plea for international competitiveness.” Not only the UK and France but also Germany shared this concern. Another aspect Haug draws attention to is preparing graduates for (international) employment. The text is not very explicit in this respect either, although this aspect is mentioned in the final paragraph and conclusion. However, the ministers were straight-forward regarding this aspect in their speeches at the seminar by mentioning the relevance of “the role of world-class universities as nurseries for innovative business, the need to have alumni in key positions abroad and the role played by the educational sector in export-oriented trade in certain countries”.<sup>24</sup> That is why mobility of both staff and students were seen as crucial elements of a higher degree programme to develop a more international mind-set, besides being an international learning experience.

As France had its Attali Report and the UK its Dearing Report, Italy had its own, in the Martinotti Report, presented in December 1997 by the former Rector of the University of Siena and the then minister Luigi Berlinguer, to reform the Italian higher education system. There was every reason for modernisation, with Italian higher education being in the most problematic situation. It had serious nepotism regarding leadership and appointments for academic and supporting staff. Moreover, 7 out of 10 students left the university without a qualification, often after having studied for a very long time- a practice dubbed ‘university mortality’. Those who left the university with a diploma were often not well prepared for their role in society.<sup>25</sup> Although burdened with a Herculean task, Berlinguer saw it as his mission to improve the situation, aware that strong opposition was ahead: “A sudden, radical revolution is not possible. The academic establishment in Italy is extremely strong and capable of opposing enormous resistance to change. Today we have an academic system that developed in a regime of paternalism and centralised authoritarianism, with everything rigidly regulated. This has produced bad results”.<sup>26</sup>

For Germany the Allègre initiative fitted seamlessly into the debate that had already been taking place for at least four years about reforms thought necessary for higher education. It was not France but Germany that suggested to include the two cycles statement in the Declaration. From 1994 on minister Jürgen Rütt-

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<sup>24</sup> Project Report Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education 7 June 1999. Prepared by Guy Haug and Jette Kirstein. Retrieved from: [http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/offdoc\\_bp\\_trend\\_i.1068715136182.pdf](http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/offdoc_bp_trend_i.1068715136182.pdf). Last accessed on 20 November 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Pauline Ravinet, The Sorbonne meeting and declaration, 11 and note 22.

<sup>26</sup> Berlinguer’s soft revolution, in: *Times Higher Education*, 7 November 1997. Retrieved from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/berlinguers-soft-revolution/104487.article>

ger was urged to initiate a reform process. The first message came from the Foreign Office that expressed concerns to the *Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK)*, the consultation body of the Federal Government and the 16 Länder – being primary responsible for the implementation of higher education – about the (lack of) international competitiveness of German higher education. In response the Federal Government launched and funded the programmes *Auslandorientierte Studiengänge* (1996) and *Master plus* (1997), based on the bachelor-master model. In 1996 a start was made with the process to amend the legislation – with full support of the German Rector’s Conference (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK)*) – formulated in the *Hochschulrahmengesetz* (Federal Higher Education Framework Act).<sup>27</sup> The new proposal was presented in October 1997 and new legislation was passed in August 1998, three months after signing the Sorbonne Declaration. It strengthened the autonomy of universities, covered the issue of quality assurance and allowed for the introduction of bachelor (3 to 4 years) and master degrees (1 to 2 years) – nation wide – on a trial basis to improve the attractiveness of degree programmes and facilitate easier recognition.<sup>28</sup>

Offering bachelor and master degrees was already possible on special authorisation of Länder governments. What is very interesting in this respect, is the initiative the HRK took in response to the proposed amendment of the legislation in 1997 to develop a set of rules to apply when defining these new type of degrees. Both types of programmes should prepare for the labour market (*‘berufsqualifizierend’*) and should be modularized by applying a credit system. This approach was intended to limit the average study time.<sup>29</sup> The German case offers a nearly complete overview of the issues at stake in higher education at the end of the twentieth century. Behind the political scene director-general Hans-Rainer Friedrich, being the right-hand man of Rüttger, played a central role as the driving force and main architect of German policy making and succeeding key legislation in this respect. As initiator of the Higher Education Committee, a working group of EU Directors-general of higher education established in 1994, he would also become one of the main authors of the Bologna Declaration. It did not make him a popular figure particularly among the vast majority of German university professors, who did not had any appetite for reforms based on a par-

<sup>27</sup> Johanna K. Witte, *Change of Degrees and Degrees of Change*, 164.

<sup>28</sup> Pauline Ravinet, *The Sorbonne meeting and declaration*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Manuel Pietzonska, *Gestaltung von Studiengängen im Zeichen von Bologna*, 38. Already in 1993 the Wissenschaftsrat published its *10 Thesen zur Hochschulpolitik* in which it was proposed to differentiate between a *‘berufsbezogenes grundständigen Studium’* and *‘ein anschliessendes forschungsorientiertes Grundstudium’*. It has to be mentioned however that in particular the Humanities and some of the Social Sciences were weak in preparing for employability fields resulting from the Humboldtian tradition.

tioning of their field in a bachelor and a master phase, which they expected would reduce their 'Lehrgebiet' (subject area).<sup>30</sup>

The Germans convinced Italy – that originally opted for an intermediate degree after two years according to the existing French and German models –, but also France – that required an extra push notwithstanding the Attali Report –, to base the future structure of higher education degrees on the undergraduate/graduate model as the international standard.<sup>31</sup> It took not much pressure and consultation to harmonise opinions, despite the far-reaching consequences. It was thought that the two-cycle system might actually be part of the solution of the internal problems and challenges for all three countries.

This is of interest because the four systems involved here, were based on the three main – quite different – educational cultures and traditions in Europe: the Humboldtian, the Anglo-Saxon and the Napoleonic models. In short the Humboldtian academic model (after Wilhelm von Humboldt's foundation of the University of Berlin in 1809) is characterised by the entrenched rights of professors and students to freedom of study and teaching, which provides (through independent research) the guiding principle of the student's university programme with the objective to serve the 'truth' (Karl Jaspers)<sup>32</sup>. The Anglo-Saxon model has a strong emphasis on the personal development of the student (John Henry Newman)<sup>33</sup>; and the Napoleonic model (France and Spain) is characterised by a heavily centralised and elitist approach.<sup>34</sup> Italy had a sort of mix of the above models but was closest to the Napoleonic one, with a strong emphasis on knowledge acquisition and reproduction, lacking critical reflection and independent thinking.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Bachelor-Master-System: Wer ist Mister Bologna?, in: *Zeit Online*: <http://www.zeit.de/2014/26/bologna-reform-hans-rainer-friedrich>

<sup>31</sup> Allègre's original idea was to set-up a first cycle of four-year. The German minister of education explained to him this made the impression of copying the US-system and would have as an effect that European first cycle students would graduate one year later and therefore being older than their US counterparts due to the different length of secondary education (one year shorter in the US). Pauline Ravinet, *The Sorbonne meeting and declaration*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Suzanne Kirkbright, *Jaspers' Early Scientific Approach In The Light Of Alexander von Humboldt's "Cosmos"*, in: *Existence. An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics and the Arts*. Volume 2, Nos 1-2, Fall 2007, pp. 51-57. Originally published in E. Salamun-Hybasek, K. Salamun & H. Stelzer, eds., *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Karl Jaspers Gesellschaft, Jahrgang 20..* Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2007. Retrieved from:

<http://www.bu.edu/paideia/existenz/volumes/Vol.2Kirkbright.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*. s.l., 1852. See for the full text: <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/>

<sup>34</sup> Jean-Marie Boisson, *Why Most French Universities Wear a Number? Some Reflections on the Recent (Hi)story of French Universities System*, in: *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*, 2012, No. 1, 90-94.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Dobbins & Christoph Knill, *Higher education governance in France, Germany, and Italy: Change and variation in the impact of transnational soft governance*, in: *Policy and*

As can be deduced from the above, the signatures of the four ministers of the Joint Sorbonne Declaration, in particular those of France, Germany and Italy, were strongly inspired by national interests.<sup>36</sup> All felt the need for reforming their own higher education sector, and required (wider) leverage for making this possible. In the three-page text, we are reminded that the European process concerns more than its economy. It is interesting to notice that it speaks of ‘European process’, not of the EU integration process, in its opening remarks. It states that Europe must be a Europe of knowledge as well and asks for strengthening and building ‘upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent’, which is related to the role of universities in the past and in future.

It urges the development of an open European area, respecting diversity, but removing ‘barriers and to develop a framework for teaching and learning, which would enhance mobility and an ever closer cooperation’. Recognition of degrees is perceived as a key issue, therefore the document refers to the Lisbon Recognition convention<sup>37</sup> and the EU directives. It stipulates that it ‘seems’ that a system is emerging ‘in which two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, should be recognized for international comparison and equivalence’. The first cycle degree should be internationally recognized ‘as an appropriate level of qualification’. It states that ‘originality and flexibility in this system will be achieved through the use of credits (such as in the ECTS scheme) and semesters’ in a lifelong context. Referring to the EU programmes it asks for mobility of undergraduate and graduate staff as well as academic staff within the European area. Of interest is also that the document stipulates that in ‘both graduate degrees, appropriate emphasis would be placed on research and autonomous work’. The crux of the document is the sentence: ‘Progressive harmonisation of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles can be achieved through strengthening of already existing experience, joint diplomas, pilot initiatives, and dialogue with all concerned’.

In summary the four countries commit themselves ‘to encouraging a common frame of reference, aimed at improving external recognition and facilitating

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*Society*. Vol. 36, No. 1, 2017, 68. Retrieved on 21 July 2017 from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14494035.2017.1278868?needAccess=true>

<sup>36</sup> Florian Feldbauer, *Soft Coordination of European Higher Education: Genesis, form and democratic legitimacy of the Bologna Process* (PhD Dissertation Universität Wien), Wien, 2008 goes even one step further by stating on the basis of an interview: ‘It is important to stress the point that the original motivations that lay behind the Sorbonne Declaration were completely national ones, 85.

<sup>37</sup> Officially named the Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region, is an international convention of the Council of Europe elaborated together with the UNESCO. As of September 2017, the Convention has been ratified by all 47 member states of the Council of Europe based in Strasbourg except for Greece and Monaco. Retrieved from: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165>. Last accessed on 14-10-2018. See for the text of the convention: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13522&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13522&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

student mobility as well as employability'. The signatories call on other EU Member States and other European countries to join its objective. It also reaches out to all European Universities, which are invited 'to consolidate Europe's standing in the world through continuously improved and updated education for its citizens'.<sup>38</sup>

The Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education system – its official title –, is a document prepared in haste. It would be criticised for being vague in its outline and formulation and for lacking a clear vision.<sup>39</sup> One might agree it is more a wish list than a vision, by using the wording 'could' and 'should' all over the document. Nevertheless, it can be read as a 'roadmap', a plan or guide for future actions. The wording of the Declaration (in English) produced and distributed by the French hosts some weeks before the celebration was met by immediate approval of the other signatories, although the UK had reservations about its title and the use of the normative phrase 'progressive harmonization of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles'. Also at later stages UK representatives kept repeating that 'harmonisation' did not fit the vocabulary of UK universities and that the more technical term 'conversion' expressed the process much better. This opinion was shared by officials of other EU countries. As Sigurd Höllinger, Director-General for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture of Austria and the chair of the working group that prepared the Bologna Declaration, phrased this in 2010: 'It was the term "harmonisation" that provoked the greatest outrage. Harmonisation was seen by critics as imposing adaptation of important elements of higher education, and as a threat to national independence in educational policy. It was of little avail to point out to the critics that the term harmonisation occurs only in the title of the declaration and once in the text.'<sup>40</sup> However, as Claude

<sup>38</sup> *Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education system*, Paris 25 May 1998. Retrieved from: [https://media.ehea.info/file/1998\\_Sorbonne/61/2/1998\\_Sorbonne\\_Declaration\\_English\\_552612.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/1998_Sorbonne/61/2/1998_Sorbonne_Declaration_English_552612.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Lauren S. Terry, *The Bologna Process and Its Impact in Europe: It's So Much More than Degree Changes*, 157.

Compare Elsa Hackl, *Towards a European area of higher education: change and convergence in European higher education*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. EUI work papers, No. 2001/9. San Domenico (Fi): European University Institute, April 2001, 18, 27 and 28, who states that the document is vague at first glance and an insufficient basis for defining rules and assessing compliance. Retrieved from [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/1718/01\\_09.pdf?sequence=1](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/1718/01_09.pdf?sequence=1). Last accessed on 20 November 2017.

Pauline Ravinet, *The Sorbonne meeting and declaration*, argues that no shared vision existed before the Sorbonne event, but that the objectives which were formulated during the preparatory phase, resulted in a coherent one, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Sigurd Höllinger, *The ideas and initiatives that led to the Bologna Declaration, and what it does not contain*. Regional Cooperation Council International Forum on Higher Education Reform: Foresight 2020 an experts' event sustaining "Novi Sad Initiative". Dubrovnik, 27th – 29th

Allègre, the French Minister of Education stipulated later, for him the connotation of harmonization was conversion, not unification or standardization. Furthermore the document was about the architecture of the system – a prime responsibility of policy makers – not about the content of education.<sup>41</sup>

Avoiding the term harmonisation became a bit of an obsession in the first years of the Bologna Process. This was nothing new, because as Papatsiba poses ‘the word ‘harmonization’ was systematically omitted in all European text relating to education’ experienced as being too sensitive.<sup>42</sup> Hywel Ceri Jones, the first Head of the department for Education and Youth policy of the European Commission, in a speech in June 2017 speaking of the 1970<sup>s</sup> reminds us that the ‘important challenge at the time was to give the political assurance that engaging in education at European level would not lead to harmonisation of educational systems, and that the European Commission would not seek to promote binding legislation on the Member States.’ He stipulates that particularly France was ‘concerned that action in this field might impinge on the very heartland of its idea of national sovereignty. He also notes that for Germany the topic was sensitive because of ‘the implications for its devolved federal system of Landers’.<sup>43</sup>

During the many official conferences organised in support of the Process, officials of the countries involved, kept repeating that the intension was convergence of policies not harmonisation.<sup>44</sup> This position can only be understood as a response to EU policy making and indeed the special role of higher education, still seen as a national responsibility, although challenged with developments not limited to that context.

## Role of terminology

Clarity of the terms and related concepts used is essential for understanding the sensitivity of terminology applied but also for a process that started with the Sorbonne Declaration and for understanding the positions of actors involved. Did they have a clear understanding and meaning of those terms and concepts

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September 2010, 4. Retrieved from: [http://www.dubrovnikforum.uns.ac.rs/docs/rt1\\_00\\_introduction\\_sigurd\\_hoellinger.pdf](http://www.dubrovnikforum.uns.ac.rs/docs/rt1_00_introduction_sigurd_hoellinger.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Johanna Katharia Witte, *Change of degrees and degrees of change*, 128- 129; concluded by the author on the basis of an interview with Allègre in 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Vassiliki Papatsiba, Making higher education more European through student mobility? Revisting EU initiatives in the context of the Bologna Process, in: *Comparative Education*. Vol. 42. No. 1, February 2006, 96.

<sup>43</sup> Hywel Ceri Jones, *Thirty Years of ERASMUS. Key note delivered at Cardiff Met*, 29 June 2017 Last retrieved on 20 November 2017 from: <https://walesforeurope.org/29.06>

<sup>44</sup> Observation of the co-coordinators of the Tuning project, who participated on invitation in a large number of seminars during the period 2001-2005.



to define policy development and implementation? One may wonder. As has been stipulated in the scholarly literature there are (strong) semantic differences between the concepts of ‘convergence’, ‘harmonization’ and ‘unification’. At the same time there is also a larger or lesser overlap between them. However, there is agreement that there is a waning manoeuvring space/ freedom of operating in this range, with convergence offering the most and unification offering the least amount of freedom. It is no wonder that from the very start the process attracted the attention of political scientists who applied a wide set of theoretical frameworks for developing a better insight into the strategies and behaviour of the actors.<sup>45</sup> To name the most relevant ones: cross-national policy diffusion<sup>46</sup>, policy transfer<sup>47</sup> and policy convergence<sup>48</sup>, – all belonging to the research area of public policies analysis<sup>49</sup> –, and multi-level governance and multi-actor governance<sup>50</sup>, including ‘the open method of coordination’<sup>51</sup> and ‘policy as a moving target’<sup>52</sup> and ‘new institutionalism’ including the path dependence perspective also covering ‘institutional change’<sup>53</sup>, based in the research field of political science and public administration theory, focussing on the implementation of government policies.

<sup>45</sup> See Johanna Katharina Witte, *Change of Degrees and Degrees of Change. Comparing adaptations of European Higher Education Systems in the context of the Bologna Process*. Enschede, 2006. In her PhD-study the author outlines a number of theoretical frameworks to apply. Given the topic of her study she applies the model of institutional change.

<sup>46</sup> Avril Keating, *Beyond the Bologna Process: Explaining policy diffusion in European education policy for schools*. Conference paper presented at ISA Annual Conference, April 2013, San Francisco: [http://www.academia.edu/3301325/Beyond\\_the\\_Bologna\\_Process\\_Explaining\\_policy\\_diffusion\\_in\\_European\\_education\\_policy\\_for\\_schools](http://www.academia.edu/3301325/Beyond_the_Bologna_Process_Explaining_policy_diffusion_in_European_education_policy_for_schools)

<sup>47</sup> Iryna, Kushnir, The Bologna Process as a Policy Transfer Issue, in: *CORERJ: Cambridge Open-Review Educational Research e-Journal* Vol.1, No. 1, 2014. Retrieved from: [http://corerj.educ.cam.ac.uk/v1n1\\_2014/Kushnir2014\\_v1\\_n1\\_The\\_Bologna\\_process\\_K.pdf](http://corerj.educ.cam.ac.uk/v1n1_2014/Kushnir2014_v1_n1_The_Bologna_process_K.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Torben Heinze and Christoph Knill, Analysing the differential impact of the Bologna Process: Theoretical considerations on national conditions for international policy convergence, in: *Higher Education*. Vol. 56, No. 4, 2008, pp. 493-510.

<sup>49</sup> Eva Maria Vögtle, *Higher Education Policy Convergence and the Bologna Process. A Cross-National Study*. Houndshills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, 2014; Isabelle Sieh, *Der Bologna-Prozess in Frankreich und Deutschland im Vergleich*, Wiesbaden, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Pedrag Lazetic, Managing the Bologna Process at the European Level: institution and actor dynamics. In: *European Journal of Education*. Special Issue: Ten Years of the Bologna Process – ‘What Future’? Vol. 45, Issue 4, pp. 549–562, December 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Ase Gornitzka, *The Open Method of Coordination as practice – A watershed in European education policy?* Working paper No. 16. ARENA, Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, December 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Guy Neave and Peter Maassen, The Bologna Process: An Intergovernmental Policy Perspective, in: Peter Maassen and Johan P. Olsen, eds., *University Dynamics and European Integration*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2007, 135-153; Barbara M. Kehm, Jeroen Huisman and Bjørn Stensaker, *The European Higher Education Area: Perspectives on a Moving Target*. Rotterdam, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Johanna Katharina Witte, *Change of degrees and degrees of change*, 2006, 49-95.

In particular, the theoretical concepts of policy diffusion, transfer and convergence have proven to be popular as methods to gain better insight into the Bologna Process; although related, all three concepts have their own advocates. **Policy diffusion** is seen as the broadest of these concepts. It originates from the studies on federalism in the USA, but was picked-up elsewhere in the world to analyse cross-national policy making. Policy diffusion has most recently been defined as a process that occurs when government policy decisions in a given jurisdiction are systematically conditioned by prior policy choices made in other jurisdictions.<sup>54</sup> It is widely accepted in the scholarly literature to distinguish three major characteristics. It is temporal – building up and slowing down –, it spreads in widening circles and it is substantive, implying that a comparable policy framework is adopted in different countries. The weakness of the policy diffusion approach, although not perceived as such by its users, is that the focus is on process not on outcomes, and it misses clear indicators for its mechanisms. It ranges from voluntary adaptation and internationally agreed harmonization to imposition of policies on other countries. In other words, diffusion can be triggered by a broad range of factors, which might or might not be accidental, depending on the concept applied.<sup>55</sup>

However, there is consensus on three broad classes of diffusion mechanisms: learning, emulation, and competition. The basic assumption is that learning takes place through shared affiliations, negotiations and institutional membership. Networking is seen as a key factor in which agents of knowledge play an important role. It allows for emulation through ‘socialization’ as a result of intensive communication within international organizations, associations and networks including scientific ones, which (might) lead through sharing knowledge, good practices and identification of challenges to common normative goals. Competition results when responding to or anticipating the successes of another apparently more attractive entity. It is assumed that policy adoption is facilitated by successful policy implementation elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> This seems to reflect the Bologna Process rather well: a voluntary process, based on informal governance and networking, involving some peer pressure, and lacking serious mechanisms to measure progress.

<sup>54</sup> Fabrizio Gilardi, Four Ways We Can Improve Policy Diffusion Research, in: *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 2016, Vol. 16(1), 9. See also Beth A. Simmons, Frank Dobbin, and Geoffrey Garrett, Introduction: the international diffusion of liberalism, in: *International Organization*. Volume 60, No. 4, 2006, 787.

<sup>55</sup> K. Weyland, Theories of Policy diffusion, in: *World Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 2005, 265.

<sup>56</sup> Eva Maria Vögtle, *Higher Education Policy Convergence*, 34; Fabrizio Gilardi, Four Ways We Can Improve Policy Diffusion Research, in: *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 2016, Vol. 16, No. 1, 8–21; See also: Diane Stone, “Learning Lessons, Policy Transfer and the International Diffusion of Policy Ideas”. Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation (CSGR) Working Paper No. 69/01 April 2001.

In conceptual terms **policy transfer** (and the related concept of lesson drawing) is close to policy diffusion by also focusing on the process, but paying more attention to the role of actors. The analytical concept of policy transfer was developed in the UK at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was inspired by globalization and Europeanization, with the latter term for the first time introduced in 1996.<sup>57</sup> Policy transfer is defined as ‘a process by which knowledge of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present)’ is used in the development of similar features in another.<sup>58</sup> It shows that the focus is more on the meso-level involving only two entities while policy diffusion takes the macro-level as its point of reference.

This allows for making the distinction between three types of mechanisms: a top-down, a bottom-up, and a horizontal approach as also reflected in policy diffusion. The top-down mechanism is based on the assumption that a group of states or intergovernmental organisations set a policy that enforces policy change by weaker entities (coercive transfer). Transfer through a bottom-up initiative might take place when entities in countries are faced with similar problems at the same time and find/ advocate a comparable solution, which is taken on board at national level. The horizontal approach reflects the interdependencies between political entities (voluntary transfer). Today, the concept also includes combinations of these three being expressed in terms of semi-coercive, conditional and obligated transfer.<sup>59</sup>

Originally focussing on the state level, gradually the concept of policy transfer has encompassed multi-processes and other actors and venues, including active promotion of policy transfer as guidance and stimulating innovation. The number of actors identified, originally being ‘elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs/ experts and supranational organisations’<sup>60</sup> (EU), has increased with transnational advocacy networks, transnational philanthropic institutions, epistemic communities, transnational corporations, intergovernmental norm diffusers (OECD) and global financial institutions. In particular EU policy making has attracted attention from researchers in this field. Also over time the register of degrees of transfer has been broadened to include photocopying, copying, adaptation, hybrid, synthesis, disciplined inspiration, selective imitation, but also policy assemblages and neg-

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<sup>57</sup> D.P. Dolowitz and D. March, Who Learns What From Whom? A Review of the Policy Transfer Literature, in: *Political Studies*, Vol. 44, No.2, pp. 343-357.

<sup>58</sup> D.P. Dolowitz and D. March, Learning from abroad: the role of policy transfer in contemporary policy making. In: *Governance* 13:5 (2000), pp. 5-23, quote: 5); See also: David Benson and Andrew Jordan, What Have We Learned from Policy Transfer Research? Dolowitz and Marsh Revisited, in: *Political Studies Review*. Vol. 9, 2011, pp. 366-378.

<sup>59</sup> S. Bulmer, D. Dolowitz, P. Humphreys and S. Pagett, *Policy Transfer in the European Union*. London: Routledge, 2007, 15.

<sup>60</sup> D.P. Dolowitz and D. March, Who Learns What From Whom?, 345.

ative lessons and failed transfer and non-transfer.<sup>61</sup> The implication is that transfer might lead to the tailoring of policies in order to allow for transfer. In Bologna terms this means that the objectives are customized to the existing national setting in the transfer process, resulting in diversified outcomes when seen in comparative perspective.

Contrary to cross-national policy diffusion and transfer, **policy convergence** focuses on effects, looking for similarity in change. As in the case of policy transfer, policy convergence theory has been fed by globalization and Europeanization. There is agreement by its users regarding its definition as ‘the tendency of societies to grow more alike, to develop similarities in structures, processes and performances’, which can also be formulated as ‘the development of similar or even identical policies across countries over time’.<sup>62</sup> The opposite of convergence is divergence, which focuses on the differences due to different political cultures in national settings. As an implication both concepts require tools for evaluation and measuring. In this respect four types are distinguished: sigma, beta, gamma and delta convergence. The most applied one is sigma convergence, which reflects a decrease in variations of domestic policies. Two main groups of factors for policy convergence have been identified: sources for convergence and facilitating factors.

In the academic literature, five sources for cross-national policy convergence are distinguished:

- a. parallel (independent) solving of similar policy problems by countries;
- b. imposition of policies on countries by other countries or international organizations;
- c. harmonization of policies through international or supranational law;
- d. regulation of economic processes (e.g. European market);
- e. transnational communication through networks.

Policy convergence will be facilitated when countries are more similar in institutional and/or cultural terms and/or with regard to their socio-economic structure and development.<sup>63</sup> Besides these factors there are more ideology determined dimensions involved in policy making, such as overarching guiding goals and principles (paradigms), techniques and instruments and the settings of these instruments. Of these, paradigms and ideas are the most challenging ones for substantiating change and therefore for diffusion, transfer and conver-

<sup>61</sup> David Benson and Andrew Jordan, What Have We Learned from Policy Transfer Research?, 369-371.

<sup>62</sup> C. Kerr, *The future of Industrial Societies: Convergence or Continuing Diversity?* Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1983, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Christoph Knill, Introduction: Cross-national policy convergence, 269-270.

gence.<sup>64</sup> In the Bologna Process originally the focus was on the system level, but gradually it also encompassed the change of paradigm regarding the teaching and learning process that was thought necessary. By broadening the agenda to the student-centred approach, the realm of structure and content was entered, which was addressed by Tuning and related projects.

**Harmonization** is stricter than conversion, because the term reflects the process of adjustment of differences and inconsistencies to bring significant features into agreement. Historically it originates from the standardisation of weights and measures. Nowadays, it also relates to methods, procedures, schedules, specifications or systems to make these uniform or mutually compatible.

Contrary to conversion, harmonization is a concept that is limited to the meta-level and related to legal systems. Being a very varied phenomenon, only recently initiatives have been developed to underpin it with a theoretical framework. A first serious attempt in this respect is the edited volume *Theory and Practice of Harmonisation*, published in 2012.<sup>65</sup> It is the follow-up of a scholarly conference organised four years earlier.<sup>66</sup> Unsurprisingly, the publication makes clear that the concept of harmonisation operates nowadays in the realm of (inter) national law. At the same time it is embedded in the economic theory of convergence and integration.<sup>67</sup> In the concluding chapter 'Towards a theory of harmonisation' it is stated that many different systems and models have developed throughout the world. Harmonisation is seen as a core instrument of the European Union and the Council of Europe. It concerns the legislation of different jurisdictions of areas, which is conceptually wider than just countries. Scholars have stipulated that the term harmonisation is often used interchangeably with integration, homogenisation (uniformity), convergence, unification and parallelism although these have linguistically different meanings.

While convergence is looking for similarities in change as we have seen, harmonisation implies the creation of something identical, e.g. a common system. It has been argued that harmonisation means the process of making rules similar, while the term uniformity relates to application and interpretation of these rules. Andenas et al. suggest in their paper to make a distinction between the concepts of 'consequential harmonisation' and 'procedural harmonisation'. While the first concept intends to achieve (a) defined outcome(s), the second one fo-

<sup>64</sup> P.A. Hall, Policy paradigms, social learning and the state. The case of economic policy making in Britain, in: *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Apr., 1993, 278-280.

<sup>65</sup> Mads Andenas and Camilla Baasch Andersen, *Theory and Practice of Harmonisation*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> *Theory and Practice of Harmonisation*, W.G. Hart Legal Workshop 2008, Institute for Advanced Legal Studies, London: University of London, Tuesday 24 June to Thursday 26 June 2008: [http://ials.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research/Hart/WGH\\_2008\\_Programme.pdf](http://ials.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research/Hart/WGH_2008_Programme.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> J. DeLong and S. Dowrick, Globalisation and Convergence, in: M. Bordo, A. Taylor & J.G. Williamson, eds., *Globalisation in Historical Perspective*. Chicago: University Press, 2002.

cusses on the process itself with the intention to find the optimum solution for a defined problem.<sup>68</sup> In the context of higher education – not touched in the paper – the first concept may imply a common terminology as well as core rules and principles. The second an agreed range of procedural tools. Of interest in this context is also a scholarly contribution published in 2013 that offers a conceptualization of harmonization in higher education systems. It distinguishes two main features of harmonization. It is a process owned by nation states while its activities are facilitated by regional institutions (e.g. the EU). The author states that the ‘process of converging objectives and aims together in higher education policies at regional level is termed as harmonization’.<sup>69</sup>

Having now offered insight in the different options of the terms and concepts related to the policy initiatives we return to the Sorbonne Declaration and its follow-up.

## Rules of the game

As outlined above, the Declaration of the four ministers – of which three had a background as academics – reached out to the universities by naming them as main contributors to progress and welfare of society: ‘We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development’. The text links knowledge circulation to staff and student mobility, it stipulates Lifelong Learning and personal development. It pays tribute to the work done already in terms of recognition of studies and for professional purposes, credits and the EU mobility programmes ERASMUS and TEMPUS, which are all supported by the academic world. It implies modularization by proposing to arrange the academic year in semesters, also required to facilitate mobility of at least one semester.<sup>70</sup>

At the heart of the document however is the proposal to create a common frame of reference/ framework for teaching and learning (‘European area of higher education’) based on two cycles to facilitate international comparison and equivalence, with the objective to become more competitive in the global higher education theatre. This is without doubt its main contribution. It includes nearly

<sup>68</sup> Mads Andenas, Camilla Baasch Andersen and Ross Ashcroft, Towards a Theory of Harmonisation, in: Mads Andenas and Camilla Baasch Andersen, *Theory and Practice of Harmonisation*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2012, pp. 572-594.

<sup>69</sup> Ennet Tadesse Woldegiorgis, Conceptualizing Harmonization of Higher Education Systems: The Application of Regional Integration Theories on Higher Education Studies, in: *Higher Education Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 2, 2013, 14.

<sup>70</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.ehea.info/uploads/declarations/sorbonne\\_declaration1.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/uploads/declarations/sorbonne_declaration1.pdf)

all the ingredients that were used in preparing and composing the Bologna Declaration in the following year. The Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1999, in short the Bologna Declaration, converted the wish list of the Sorbonne Declaration into a list of concrete aims and objectives.

The drawing up of the Sorbonne Declaration, which was perceived as a solo action of four EU member states, did upset the other EU Countries as well as the European Commission.<sup>71</sup> Immediate action proved to be required. Important in appeasing the EU family of countries and their university world was the leadership shown by the Austrian EU Presidency in the second half of 1998. Only three years earlier the country had joined the EU, together with Finland and Sweden. Austria took the initiative to put the Sorbonne issue of the modernisation of higher education on the agenda for an informal conference of the Ministers of Education. Baroness Blackstone facilitated the start of the ministerial meeting by declaring that: “*harmonisation does not mean harmonisation*”.<sup>72</sup> The Sorbonne Declaration was also scheduled at the regular meeting of the Directors-General of Higher Education. This type of meeting was in existence since 1974 and was every second time attended by representatives of the two European Rectors’ Conferences. This was also the case for the one that took place in the autumn of 1989. In particular, smaller EU countries like Portugal and the Netherlands were really upset by being confronted with a ‘road map’ that they were invited to join, without having been consulted, on an issue clearly belonging to national sovereignty and considered to be of great importance. Not only implicitly by the invitation in the text in the Declaration<sup>73</sup>, but also in explicit terms by Berlinguer, who invited them for a follow-up meeting. This meeting was announced orally at the end of the Sorbonne meeting and confirmed later in official writing to the other EU countries.

It might have been practice in the EU and its precursor the European Communities that some large countries took the lead in policy defining but it was

<sup>71</sup> European Commission, *The history of European cooperation in education and training. Europe in the making — an example*, Luxembourg, 2006, 197. See also: Robert Harmsen, *The Bologna Process and New Modes of Governance: Logics and Limits of Arena-shaping*. Paper prepared for the EUSA Thirteenth Biennial Conference. Baltimore, 2013. Retrieved from <https://orbilu.uni.lu/bitstream/10993/12170/1/Harmsen-Bologna%20Process.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> Sigurd Höllinger, *The ideas and initiatives that led to the Bologna Declaration, and what it does not contain*. Regional Cooperation Council International Forum on Higher Education Reform: Foresight 2020 an experts’ event sustaining “Novi Sad Initiative”. Dubrovnik, 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010, 6-7. Retrieved from: [http://www.dubrovnikforum.uns.ac.rs/docs/rt1\\_00\\_introduction\\_sigurd\\_hoellinger.pdf](http://www.dubrovnikforum.uns.ac.rs/docs/rt1_00_introduction_sigurd_hoellinger.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> ‘We call on other Member States of the Union and other European countries to join us in this objective and on all European Universities to consolidate Europe’s standing in the world through continuously improved and updated education for its citizens.’

quite exceptional that the actual blue print was published before consultation had taken place with the other members. The way countries responded showed that they framed the initiative of the Sorbonne signatures initially in EU policy terms, not as a coordinated effort of some individual European countries. The latter would have been a possibility given the fact that the EU and the Commission had no mandate regarding (higher) education issues, despite coordinated actions such as the ERASMUS and TEMPUS Mobility Programmes. That the Commission in the meantime thought it had built-up at least some authority in the field of higher education, is clear from the acid response to the Declaration – still at the Sorbonne meeting – of its director for Higher Education, Domenico Lenarduzzi. The fact that originally the Commission was not even invited as an observer will not have helped.<sup>74</sup>

It has to be stressed that the relation between the European integration process and the topic of higher education has been a very delicate one, since it was no more than touched in the Treaty of Rome (1957), as Anne Corbett has outlined convincingly in her book *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge* and other publications<sup>75</sup>. What started with the single idea of establishing a European ‘institution of university status’ – which took twenty years (1976) to accomplish in the European University Institute in Florence<sup>76</sup> – only developed in the 70<sup>s</sup> and the 80<sup>s</sup> into a European educational dimension. It required political initiatives from Commission and European Parliament and some rulings of the European Court of Justice – offering more manoeuvring space – to make serious progress.<sup>77</sup> As a result, it enabled the establishment of the Action Programme on education in 1976 that also included higher education and created a basis for further cooperation. This Programme served as an important step for developing, adopting and the launching of five key EU programmes, COMETT, Lingua, Jean

<sup>74</sup> Pauline Ravinet, *The Sorbonne meeting and declaration: Actors, shared vision and Europeanisation*, 22. Lenarduzzi is not named in person in the scholarly literature regarding the Sorbonne Declaration, being the director. According to academics present, he was seriously upset.

<sup>75</sup> Ann Corbett, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge. Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Union Higher Education Policy, 1955-2005*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005; Ann Corbett, *Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurs: towards a new history of higher education in the European Community*, in: *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2003; Ann Corbett, *Principles, Problems, Politics ... What Does the Historical Record of EU Cooperation in Higher Education Tell the EHEA Generation?*, in: Adrian Curaj, Peter Scott, Lazar Viasceanu and Lesley Wilson, eds., *European Higher Education at the Crossroads*. Part 1. Dordrecht: Springer Science + Business Media, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> The convention establishing the Institute was signed on 19 April 1972, agreement had been reached in 1971 at the first European Community meeting of Ministers of Education.

<sup>77</sup> Ann Corbett, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge*, 97-148. See for a detailed description of relevant rulings of the Court of Justice Rulings: Sacha Garben, *EU Higher Education Law. The Bologna Process and the Harmonization by Stealth*. Alphen aan de Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 2011, 99-138.



Monnet and the already mentioned ambitious ERASMUS and TEMPUS schemes in the late 1980<sup>s</sup>.

This was all people's work. Instrumental in the whole process was the Welshman Hywel Ceri Jones, an educational entrepreneur pure sang according to Corbett. He was the Commission architect and main lobbyist of the Action Programme and co-initiator of its follow-up programmes. He based his inspiration on his experiences at the first UK *plate-class* university, the University of Sussex, established in 1961. It was founded on the new concept of 'schools' (instead of faculties and departments), and was innovative in particular regarding educational methods and content, promoting the inter-disciplinary approach. Sussex would play a role in many European initiatives to come. Jones, starting as Head of the new department of Education and Youth policy in 1973, was promoted in 1979 to director for Education, Vocational Training and Youth policy. Being a supporter of voluntary convergence and strongly opposing harmonization or standardization in the educational field, he proved to be the right man at the right place.<sup>78</sup> Having said this, it did not imply that the road to more coordination and cooperation in the field of higher education was without many hick-ups.

Although the 1976 Action Programme was limited in scope, concentrating on setting-up transnational joint study programmes, short study visits and developing university networks, it nevertheless discomfited a number of national governments (e.g. Denmark, France and the UK) who feared that the Commission might slowly extend its competence in the field of education at the costs of national authorities. This feeling blocked further initiatives for a period of ten years. It changed with the installation of a new energetic Commission presided by Jacques Delors in January 1985. A new angle was brought into play: human resources and skills development to create a sustainable basis for a technology-based economy. It was also thought necessary to counterforce growing political cynicism about the European Communities by focusing more on culture by giving a more prominent role to education to underpin the development of one single market, being in the interest of the individual member states. This fitted well in the call of the European Council of 1984 to strengthen and promote the European identity and image 'both for its citizens and the rest of the world'.<sup>79</sup> An ad hoc committee on People's Europe, chaired by the Italian Pietro Adonnino, was established, to come up with concrete initiatives within half a year. It proposed not only a comprehensive programme of European inter-university exchanges and studies open to a significant part of European Community students, but also to develop a European academic credit transfer scheme to facilitate

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<sup>78</sup> Hywel Ceri Jones, *Thirty Years of ERASMUS*. Key note hold at Cardiff Met, June 29, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://walesforeurope.org/29-06>.

<sup>79</sup> Ann Corbett, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge*, 125-126.

mobility. Although helpful, it proved only one stone of many necessary to erect the building of the ERASMUS Programme, the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students.

Another stone was the experience to obtain support and agreement regarding the COMETT programme, focusing on technology, and therefore closer to the accepted authority and role of the European Commission. It took a lot of lobbying from both Commission officials, in particular Jones, but also University Rectors, and a full year of intensive political negotiations, involving the heads of state and ministers of foreign affairs and finance ministers – partly to outflank some of the more reserved ministers of education –, to get the ERASMUS Programme approved. This approval underlined the idea of the successful Action Programme, involving more than 500 universities in 1984, that the European Commission/Community should play a role in the area of higher education, although its role should be limited to a facilitator of transnational cooperation. The Commission was kept at a short rope, because the legal basis for creating the framework programmes, like COMETT and ERASMUS, was created in such a way, that the member states kept a final say regarding the budget to be made available.

In the Treaty of Maastricht (7 February 1993), which came into force in the same year, establishing the European Union and defining European citizenship, the borderlines of the playground for international policy making in (higher) education were set. Recognising that one of the objectives of the EU is ‘a contribution to education and training of quality and the flowering of the cultures of the Member States’ (article 3), according to the principles of subsidiarity (the principle that decisions should always be taken at the lowest possible level or closest to where they will have their effect) it stipulates in article 126: ‘The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of their teaching and the organization of educational systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity’. This should be realized for higher education by developing the European dimension in education with focus on language learning, mobility of staff and students, recognition of diplomas and periods of study, promoting cooperation between HE institutions and encouraging the development of distance education. Implementation should be incentives policy based; ‘harmonization of the laws and regulations of the Member States’ being out of the question.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Treaty on European Union (92/C191/01). *Official Journal of the European Union* 29.7.92. Retrieved from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11992M/TXT>. Last accessed on 20 November 2017.

The Treaty confirms, however, the direct relationship between the European Commission and the Higher Education institutions and their teaching staff being modelled in the Community Programmes mentioned above. This is made most explicit in the Jean Monnet programme, launched in 1989, aiming at promoting excellence in teaching and research in the field of EU studies, but in practical terms inviting higher education institutions to establish Chairs and Centres of Excellence and to introduce teaching modules and to serve as an international (social) network, coordinated by the European Commission. Although respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions it meant in all objectivity ‘contributing’ to the curriculum of at least part of the student population and a strategy of strengthening Europe’s cultural identity and went much further than establishing a European University Institute. It fitted well in the agreed objective at Maastricht to promote political integration on the Continent and the Council Call of 1984 to further European Identity and image. It showed at the same time that the relationship of the European project and (higher) education was a balancing act of the highest complexity; at least in the understanding of the Member States, anxious to protect their vested interests and its universities as main contributors to national culture and identity.

## Preparing the ground

Many authors have tried to identify the reasons of countries for aligning with the Sorbonne Declaration initiative of the big EU four. Five main arguments can be distinguished. The main argument put forward has been that a transnational step would help as a *leverage* to national reforms which were thought necessary; reforms that should make higher education systems more effective and financially affordable for the national budget, worth the investment in terms of the quality of its outcomes and at the same time be able to serve large(r) numbers of students.<sup>81</sup> Some have suggested that rhetoric was central. This refers to the awareness that the European economy should move from a more industrialized economy to an economy based on development and innovation, expressed in terms as knowledge society and economy. This would require a highly or – probably better phrased – higher educated population, to be able to keep the

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<sup>81</sup> Guy. Neave, The Bologna Process as Alfa or Omega or, on Interpreting History and Context as Inputs to Bologna, Prague, Berlin and Beyond, in: Alberto Ameral, a.o., *European Integration and the Governance of Higher Education and Research*, 50-51; Ravinet, Pauline, *When constraining links emerge from loose cooperation: Mechanisms of involvement and building of a follow-up structure in the Bologna process*, Third International Euredocs Conference (Sub-theme 1). Centre for Higher Education Research University, University of Kassel, 16th-18th June 2006, 11.

national economies growing and the welfare state in place.<sup>82</sup> Others have put forward that the internationalization of the higher education sector (also) played a decisive role, as a result of competition, student mobility and recognition issues. This would imply a re-positioning, from a primary nationally (or locally) operating higher education institutions to universities functioning in an European or even global environment.<sup>83</sup> The fourth argument focuses on obtaining credibility for the national higher education system in more general terms by cooperating with other countries with a higher status. This argument was in particular of relevance for EU candidate or associate countries, the former members of the communist bloc.<sup>84</sup> The fifth argument brought forward stresses strategic anticipation by avoiding the risk to miss the boat in relation to the low risks or ‘costs’ of signing.<sup>85</sup> For each country a different mix of arguments will have played a role depending on the state and prestige of its educational system.

But is this set of arguments completely convincing? What has not been made explicit in publications so far is the dynamism of society and economy versus the traditional way higher education institutions were operating; focusing in their curricula mainly on knowledge acquisition, reproduction and at best transfer, far less on the development of new knowledge and skills.<sup>86</sup> This was the sensitive key issue that governments were struggling with being much more than rhetoric; the real reason why countries needed an external leverage, universities and their

<sup>82</sup> Pauline Ravinet, From Voluntary Participation to Monitored Coordination: why European countries feel increasingly bound by their commitment to the Bologna Process, in: *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2008; T. Nokkala, Knowledge society/ knowledge economy discourse in inter-nationalisation of higher education — A case study in governmentality, in: T. Halvorsen & A. Nyhagen, eds., *The Bologna Process and the Shaping of the Future of Knowledge Societies*. Conference report from the third conference on Knowledge and Politics. Bergen, 2005, pp. 94–117; A. Fejes, The Bologna process — Governing higher education in Europe through standardisation, in: T. Halvorsen & A. Nyhagen, eds., *The Bologna Process and the Shaping of the Future of Knowledge Societies*. Bergen, 2005, pp. 219–231.

<sup>83</sup> Elsa Hackl, *Towards a European Area of Higher Education: Change and Convergence in European higher education*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. EUI work papers, No. 2001/9. San Domenico (Fi): European University Institute, April 2001, 16, 32; Cornalia Racké, *The Bologna Process and the EU*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Barbara G. Haskel, *When Can a Weak Process Generate Strong Results? Entrepreneurial Alliances in the Bologna Process to Create a European Education Area*. Center for European Studies Working Paper Series #165, 2008, 4-5.

<sup>85</sup> Pauline Ravinet, *When constraining links emerge from loose cooperation*, 9-10; Barbara G. Haskel, Weak Process, Strong Results: Cooperation in European Higher Education, in: Tömmel, Ingeborg and Amy Verdun, eds., *Innovative Governance in the European Union: The Politics of Multilevel Policymaking*. Boulder, Col: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009, 277; Robert Harmsen, *The Bologna Process and New Modes of Governance: Logics and Limits of Arena-shaping*. Paper prepared for the EUSA Thirteenth Biennial Conference. Baltimore, 2013. Retrieved from <https://orbilu.uni.lu/bitstream/10993/12170/1/Harmsen-Bologna%20Process.pdf>, 8.

<sup>86</sup> The argument is mentioned briefly by Elisa Hackl in the conclusion of her paper *Towards a European Area of Higher Education*, 31.

staffs and its syndicates simply being too powerful and/or unwilling or incapable to reform. In the 1990s the communication and information technology really took off. At the same time new economies in other parts of the world were taking over the production of industrial goods because of lower production costs, while a number of economic crises occurred in the second half of the 1990s. The scale of companies and private financial institutions were growing rapidly: industry and the banking sector were internationalizing. There were indeed good reasons to develop a single European market, which should allow for free movements of its citizens, if only to balance the growing influence of global companies and financial institutions. This would require a leadership generation with international experience, preferably already developed during university studies. It would also require a mind-set focusing on innovation based on high-level knowledge and skills.

All this is reflected in ‘Communications’ published by the European Commission in the 1990s: ‘Memorandum on higher education in the European Community’ (1991), ‘Green Paper on the European Dimension of Education’ (1993), Teaching and learning, towards the learning society, Commission White paper (1995) and ‘Toward a Europe of Knowledge. Communication from the Commission’ (1997). The Commission also expressed its concerns about the free movement of students and staff in the Green Paper ‘The obstacles to trans-national mobility’ (1996). A Green Paper is intended to stimulate discussion on identified topics and proposals on the basis of consultation and debate. A White Paper contains proposals for action at European level. Their documents show that the Commission already identified the challenges Europe was facing before the Sorbonne and Bologna Declaration were signed. This explains the initial response of its director for education to the initiative of Allègre, mentioned earlier.

In this context, it is intriguing how Allègre and Blackstone motivated their strategy to keep the Commission at a distance in interviews with researchers years later. Allègre in 2004: ‘One must understand that this process was completely contrary to the European Commission’s process. The European Commission wanted to bring about an uniformation of degrees, meaning they wanted to establish a European programme which would be the same everywhere. But we had all understood that if we would carry this out, it would fail to go through because people were attached to their degrees. So we said: “We need to establish levels of equivalence.” It was about harmonization – this is an important word! – and not *uniformation*.’<sup>87</sup> Was he referring here to European directives and co-ordinating directives regarding the mutual recognition of formal qualifications for regulated professions such as the health care sector, engineering and architecture? These indeed led to standardisation of the content of curricula to

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<sup>87</sup> Johanna Katharina Witte, *Change of degrees and degrees of change*, 129.

various levels and indeed limited national education policies, or maybe more precisely phrased, brought limitations to academic freedom. Or did he have in mind directive 89/48/EEC – adopted in 1988 – which should regulate that graduates with a diploma covering at least three years of professional higher education and training would be able to practice their profession in each of the Member States? This last ‘horizontal’ form had in common with the ‘vertical’ form – applied in the case of individual disciplines – that it was meant for professional purposes not academic recognition, although both are mentioned in the Sorbonne Declaration.<sup>88</sup> Interesting to notice is that these directives were the responsibility of DG Market, not of the Educational Unit, which only became a separate Directorate in 1999.

Blackstone simply neglected the (analysing) work that had already been done at the European level. In her view the Sorbonne was just a coordinated action of four individual countries to position themselves better in a global higher education market: ‘...nothing anti-European in this initiative and it also was not hostile to the small EU Member States ... it was not designed as a European initiative or for a European purpose in the first place’.<sup>89</sup> If so, why then inviting other European countries to join their initiative? The opinions of Allègre and Blackstone expressed here, do not do justice to the work established by the European Commission in the years up to the Sorbonne Declaration and the policies outlined, and show clearly the pre-occupation of national governments to keep a firm grip on educational policies and the felt need to play down the European dimension.

The 1997 Communication ‘Towards a Europe of Knowledge’, building on previous documents, indicates two major pre-occupations: knowledge policies and promoting employability. It offers the line of argument and motivation to promote change: “Economic competitiveness, employment and the personal fulfilment of the citizens of Europe is no longer mainly based on the production of physical goods, nor will it be in the future. Real wealth creation will henceforth be linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge and will depend first and foremost on our efforts in the field of research, education and training and on our capacity to promote innovation. This is why we must fashion a veritable “Europe of knowledge”. This ‘knowledge society’ requires innovation, research, education and training policies which drive society as ‘one of the four fundamental pillars of the Union’s internal policies’. It should be reached by ‘an open and dynamic European educational area’ which should gradually be constructed on the basis of three dimensions: (1) development of knowledge in a Lifelong Learning context, (2) enhancement of citizenship related to mutual understanding of the cultural diversities of Europe as well as the principles of sol-

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<sup>88</sup> Elsa Hackl, *Towards a European Area of Higher Education*, 7-9.

<sup>89</sup> Cornelia Racké, *Emergence of the Bologna Process*, 12.

identity and (3) acquisition of the most useful set of competences required for employability and taking into account the evaluation of job profiles.<sup>90</sup>

What makes the Commission Memorandum, Papers and Communications special is not only their thorough analyses of the context in which higher education would be operating in the near future, but most of all to make clear – although not expressed so directly – that the content of curricula should be reformed: what kind of learning would be required and is not learned or not sufficiently learned in higher education institutions at present? A sensitive issue indeed, in particular because in 1988 388 of the leading and oldest European universities had taken a stand by signing the *Magna Charta Universitatum* at the occasion of the 900<sup>th</sup> celebration of the University of Bologna. The universities positioned themselves as major drivers of future prosperity ‘in a changing and increasingly international society’. However, they stipulated explicitly they could only play that role as autonomous entities: ‘To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power’. This requires the fundamental principle of freedom in research and training, which should be ensured by both governments and universities. The preamble of the document refers to the ‘definitive abolition of boundaries between the countries of the European Community in four years’ time’, stressing at the same time that cooperation is thought between all European nations. It is one year before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Having without doubt the Community Action Programme of 1976 and its successor the ERASMUS Scheme in mind, the signatories made explicit they supported joint projects for the advancing of learning as well as student and staff mobility: mirroring their ambition, the document also states that the universities consider developing ‘a general policy of equivalent status, titles, examinations (without prejudice to national diplomas) and award of scholarships essential to the fulfilment of their mission in the conditions prevailing today’.<sup>91</sup> Roles and responsibilities are stressed very widely. It is obvious the Commission had an eye on this declaration, which became a globally accepted beacon, when reminding universities about their self-assigned role in its Green and White Papers and Communications in the years to come.

In its documents the Commission also draws attention to the issue of recognition of degrees and periods of studies in relation to mobility. The latter based on the experiences obtained in the framework of developing and implementing

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<sup>90</sup> *Communication from the European Commission: Towards a Europe of Knowledge*, Brussels, 1997, 1: <http://aei.pitt.edu/5546/1/5546.pdf>

<sup>91</sup> Text *Magna Charta Universitatum*, Bologna 18 September 1988. Retrieved from: <http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/the-magna-charta/english>

ECTS as well as a European Pilot project implemented in the 1990s.<sup>92</sup> It resulted in the adoption in September 1998 of a Council Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education, which again created the basis for the foundation of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).<sup>93</sup> The topic of recognition brings other players – active in the arena of European higher education – into the picture: UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The mission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through, among other things, education. The Council of Europe, founded in 1949, is a regional intergovernmental organisation promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in its 47 member states. It runs a department in the field of higher education and research focusing on issues related to the recognition of qualifications, public responsibility for higher education and research and higher education governance. It would be these two organisations that jointly initiated the replacement of existing weak recognition arrangements by a treaty, the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, in short the Lisbon Recognition Convention, agreed in 1997 and signed and ratified by nearly all European countries since.<sup>94</sup> It proved not to be sufficient reason to involve these organisations in the preparation of the Bologna Declaration. The Convention is perceived now as one of the core elements of the Bologna Process. Although being a significant step forward, it also had and still has a fundamental weakness which is the final responsibility for recognition of periods of study. This responsibility is not a matter for governments but for universities and their examination boards, which – the *Magna Charta Universitatum* tells us – is to be taken very seriously.

## Marching together

Overseeing again all that was proposed, discussed and agreed since the mid-1980s at European level the Sorbonne and Bologna Declaration were based on

<sup>92</sup> European Commission, Green Paper of 2 October 1996: Education – Training – Research: the obstacles to transnational mobility, *Bulletin of the European Union Supplement* 5/96.

<sup>93</sup> For the text of the Council Recommendation: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31998H0561&from=EN>. See also: Report of the European Commission on the implementation of Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (2004). Retrieved from: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2004/EN/1-2004-620-EN-F1-1.Pdf>

<sup>94</sup> Council of Europe and UNESCO, *The Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region*. Retrieved from: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13522&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13522&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)



solid ground and fertile soil, although not prepared by national governments. It was indeed the European Commission that created the basis for a European area of higher education through its mobility programmes, ECTS, its directives for professional recognition, the Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in Higher Education and its pleas for modernisation of teaching and learning in its Papers and Communications by introducing the concepts of the 'Knowledge Society' and the 'Europe of Knowledge'.

Nevertheless, the entrepreneurial action of Allègre and his three colleagues was unique and decisive in one crucial aspect: the introduction of cycles based on levels of equivalence. The idea does not show up in the European Commission documents and therefore Allègre is correct that this is the real innovative element of the Declaration. However it has to be acknowledged that some EU countries already had initiated reforms in that direction. In that sense it was in 'the air' already. Given the sensitivity in the Member States regarding the responsibility for higher education, only a national government or – even better – a group of countries could successfully propose such a model. It would have been unthinkable that the idea would have come from either universities or an international body such as the European Commission, given the lack of competences and therefore limited role, UNESCO or the Council of Europe. It would have been put aside as an inappropriate attempt to 'harmonize' – in the meaning of the French '*uniformation*' – European Higher Education, coming from these organisations and therefore a no-go.<sup>95</sup> From this perspective, one can argue that the other European countries should be grateful for the Sorbonne initiative, because it gave those countries a serious instrument – much more than a leverage – to modernise their own higher education system on a voluntary basis. However, from the point of view of the Commission it could only be perceived as a successful attempt by some Member States to hijack its higher education agenda. It came at a time when the EU countries would have been forced by the logic of the argument to take action anyway, but in that case initiated by the Commission based on its robust analyses of current developments; a strategy applied by the European Commission successfully in defining many of its policies before and after.

In this situation, it had to be the presiding country of the European Council of ministers, Austria, to pick-up the Sorbonne initiative, initiating a follow-up initiative by involving the most important stakeholders. According to the same logic a central role was given to the Higher Education Committee, the meeting of Directors-General for Higher Education of the EU Member States. An informal body typical for discussing shared issues with national interests in mind. It established at its meeting in October 1998 a Steering Committee, the Sorbonne

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<sup>95</sup> Sacha Garben in her PhD dissertation *EU Higher Education Law: The Bologna Process and Harmonization by Stealth* draws a similar conclusion.

Follow-up Group, to assist in the preparation of the Bologna conference, consisting of the directors-general of a selected number of countries according to the EU troika model plus Italy, a representative of the European Commission and representatives of the two European Rectors' Conferences, forerunners of the European University Association (EUA) plus – suggested by Italy – a representation of France and UK using the argument to cover the three dominant models of higher education in Europe.<sup>96</sup>

Although many other EU countries were upset by the Sorbonne initiative of the four large countries, accusing them of not following regular EU procedures, they were rather gentle in their judgment about the Declaration itself. This, in particular, after having taken notice of the interpretation of Guy Haug, senior advisor of the CRE and former employee of the Erasmus Bureau, the administrative unit for running the Community programmes. His observations were discussed and validated by the Steering Committee and resulted in the publication of the Trends Report. It was the outcome of a project implemented by the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences, in co-operation with the Association of European Universities (CRE) and commissioned and financed by the European Commission. It was the first time the European Commission took up its facilitating role of what would become practice. The Trends Report showed that the European higher education scene was quite diverse, national systems having not much in common and were indeed struggling with the issues that inspired the Sorbonne Declaration: not being very cost effective, preparing their graduates insufficiently for a role in society, and not very competitive in global perspective. It also noted that there was a tendency already in a growing number of countries to introduce 'bachelor/master' studies as part of a reform of the higher education sector. The report fully supported the Sorbonne idea of making a distinction between the undergraduate and (post)graduate level because it is 'so widespread around the world that not also having it would make continental Europe an even more isolated island of incompatibility' and concludes that the Declaration 'was more than justified to promote a move in that direction'.<sup>97</sup> In other words, it showed that it made much sense to align efforts to find solutions for shared challenges and concerns. Why in that case not march together in the same direction, while holding on to national sovereignty?

<sup>96</sup> Sigurd Höllinger, *The ideas and initiatives that led to the Bologna Declaration, and what it does not contain*. Regional Cooperation Council International Forum on Higher Education Reform: Foresight 2020 an experts' event sustaining "Novi Sad Initiative". Dubrovnik, 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010, 7. Retrieved from: [http://www.dubrovnikforum.uns.ac.rs/docs/rt1\\_00\\_introduction\\_sigurd\\_hoellinger.pdf](http://www.dubrovnikforum.uns.ac.rs/docs/rt1_00_introduction_sigurd_hoellinger.pdf). See also: Elsa Hackl, *Towards a European Area of Higher Education*, 22-23.

<sup>97</sup> *Project Report Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education* 7 June 1999, 7.

Like the Sorbonne Declaration, the Bologna Declaration was organized outside the EU-framework. It has been argued that Bologna should be seen as the real start of a process, and the Sorbonne a false start.<sup>98</sup> This, as has been shown, is not in accordance to what really happened, even if countries would have liked to see it otherwise. It has to be acknowledged there would never have been a Bologna Declaration without ‘Sorbonne’ and even more the work done by the European Commission in the 1980s and 1990s although the EU Member States were not willing to valuing the latter role. This is made explicit by the text of the Declaration, in which the Commission is not mentioned, as one of the actors of a process to arrive to the Bologna Declaration. This process has been described by Elsa Hackl in a well-informed scholarly paper<sup>99</sup>. She was at the time director at the Austrian Ministry for Higher Education and Research; the country and Ministry that initiated broadening the debate to all EU countries some months after the signing of the Sorbonne Declaration. She offers us insight into the tensions between the Commission and the national governments. The Commission representative tried twice to prevent that activities already covered by EU actions, were stressed again in the forthcoming Declaration, because this was felt as undermining its position and prestige. Although this overlap seemed to be in conflict with the agreed principle of subsidiarity, he failed. This attitude probably fuelled Allègre’s and Blackstone’s refusal to upgrade the Commission as a full partner in the process.<sup>100</sup>

The final text agreed by the Steering Group contained more or less five (out of the six) objectives that were directly drawn from EU initiatives with which the EU Member States had agreed earlier. Preparing the text and organising the signatories proved to be a challenge in itself due to the fact that Austria, as initiator of the initiative, and Italy, as host of the event, questioned each other’s authority. This became visible because they each prepared their own competing drafts, although it had been agreed that Guy Haug would prepare a first draft.<sup>101</sup> A crucial mediating role was played by the German director-general Hans-Rain-

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<sup>98</sup> Jeroen Huisman, et al., The Bologna process and its impact in the European Higher Education Area and beyond, states for example that the ‘year 1999 will very likely appear in the history books as a key moment in European higher education’. In: *The Sage Handbook of International Higher Education*, 81.

<sup>99</sup> Elsa Hackl, *Towards a European Area of Higher Education: Change and Convergence in European higher education*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. EUI work papers, No. 2001/9. San Domenico (Fi): European University Institute, April 2001. The paper was prepared at the European University Institute in Florence.

<sup>100</sup> Sacha Garben, *EU Higher Education Law. The Bologna Process and Harmonization by Stealth*, Alphen aan de Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 2011, 167.

<sup>101</sup> Pauline Ravinet, *When constraining links emerge from loose cooperation*, 15; Sigurd Höllinger, *The ideas and initiatives that led to the Bologna Declaration*, 8.

er Friedrich who travelled from country to country in the months prior to the Bologna Forum. He celebrated the agreement as a personal success.<sup>102</sup>

The Bologna Declaration<sup>103</sup> is straightforward in that it identifies two main related challenges: compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education in Europe and international competitiveness. These forms the basis for outlining the 6 objectives to develop the ‘European Higher Education Area’, the official title of the joint declaration. These objectives are:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.
3. Establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned.
4. Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:
  - a. for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
  - b. for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.
5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
6. Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter- institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

<sup>102</sup> Bachelor-Master-System: Wer ist Mister Bologna?, in: *Zeit Online*. Retrieved from: <http://www.zeit.de/2014/26/bologna-reform-hans-rainer-friedrich>

<sup>103</sup> Bologna Declaration 1999 – European Ministers for Higher Education, *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education*. Bologna 19 June 1999. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100210/ministerial-conference-bologna-1999.html>

These objectives are formulated as action points, and, as said, were not covering new ground, except in accepting the Sorbonne idea that higher education should be organized in cycles. The objectives 1 (at least partly), 3, 4 and 6 were covered by the EU SOCRATES Programme already, being the successor in 1994 of the ERASMUS Programme. Objective 5 was the topic of the Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education which is based on two Commission pilot projects and the official European Communities Communications published in the 1990s. The Diploma Supplement resulted from a joint working party and pilot project 1996-1998 of the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO. The remark included in objective 2 that first cycle programmes should last at least three years and be relevant for the European labour market is conform directive 89/48/EEC – adopted in 1988 – which regulates practicing a profession in another Member State.

The small staff of the Commission involved in the Bologna preparation confirmed in later interviews that they were not amused at the time, but the fact that nearly all objectives were taken from EU initiatives was – at least by one of them – perceived as a ‘great compliment’.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, one can also interpret the outcomes of the process as a defeat for the Commission, in which its ‘carefully built up position was structurally undermined and its ideas copied without giving much credit; in academic terms an obvious form of committing plagiarism.’<sup>105</sup> It is clear that in the case of higher education the policy of subsidiarity and complementary was interpreted differently than in other fields of Community action.

In this perspective, the document contains interesting features, referring on the one hand to the EU and on the other to the wider concept of ‘Europe’. It opens with the European process becoming a reality for both the Union and its citizens; whereas only half of the signatories were EU Member States at the time!<sup>106</sup> It speaks of ‘enlargement prospects’ which ‘together with deepening relations with

<sup>104</sup> Gangolf Brand, *The Bologna Process as an Instance of Strategic Europeanisation – the Role of the European Commission*, 10-11. The interviews took place in 2011. See also: Kerstin Martens & Carolin Balzer, *Comparing Governance of International Organisations – The EU, the OECD and Educational Policy*. Paper presented to the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions, Workshop 1 International Organisations and Policy Implementation, Uppsala, Sweden, April 13-18, 2004, 9. Retrieved from: <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/9afeceac-b81c-4bd5-9578-3811ea019b7a.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> Sacha Garben, *EU Higher Education Law. The Bologna Process and Harmonization by Stealth*, Alphen aan de Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 2011, 167-169 draws a comparable conclusion.

<sup>106</sup> EU signatory countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities separately), Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom; Non-EU signatory countries: Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland.

other European countries provide even wider dimensions to that reality', to allow to cover all the signatory countries. The "Europe of Knowledge" concept is stressed, being 'an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European Citizenship', directly taken from the discourse included in the Commission Communications and Papers. In its felt need for profiling the role of education it applies rather bold statements. It stipulates that the importance of education and educational cooperation is universally acknowledged 'as paramount' in the 'development and strengthen of stable, peaceful and democratic societies'; Europe as an example for the rest of the world? It goes even one step further: 'The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries' by relating this to 'our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions', which – in terms of competitiveness – deserve 'world-wide degree of attraction'. This should be realized by promoting the 'European system of higher education world-wide'; a remarkable statement again because an area is not the same as a system having different and more precise features. It is no wonder the Declaration, its underpinning motives as well as its objectives were accused of being Eurocentric by outsiders.<sup>107</sup>

In relation to these statements it is interesting to see what is *not* said in the document. It does not mention the importance of '*bildung*', preparation for individual citizenship and personal developments of students, or in the wording of the American author Paul L. Gaston there are no references 'to the pleasure of learning, to the importance of acquaintance with different cultures, or to the value of education beyond the education'.<sup>108</sup> The document makes a technocratic impression and is clearly written from the perspective of national authorities and university management, not even giving lip service to the role of individual teachers in the learning process and the needs and expectations of individual students. It is therefore no surprise that criticisms of the document and the follow-up process focused in particular on these aspects. As might be expected it was also heavily criticized for having mainly the economic dimension – as reflected in its first objective – in mind.<sup>109</sup> An element the European Commission

<sup>107</sup> See for example: Dzulhifli Abdul Razak, *The Internationalisation of Education: A Western Construct*, in: Mary Stiasny and Tim Core, eds., *Going Global. The landscape for policy makers and practitioners in tertiary education*. Bingley (British Council) 2012, 15; Bosse Lagervist, Ingrid Martins Holmberg and Ola Wetterberg, *Integrated Conservation of Built Environments: Swedish Reflections from Three Decades of Program Development*, in: Barry L. Stiefel and Jeremy C. Wells, eds., *Preservation Education: Sharing Best Practices and Common Ground* (Lebanon NH (University Press of New England) 2014, 124; Paul L Gaston, *The Challenge of Bologna*, 36.

<sup>108</sup> Paul. L Gaston, *The Challenge of Bologna*, 34-35.

<sup>109</sup> See for example: Sigurd Höllinger, *The ideas and initiatives that led to the Bologna Declaration, and what it does not contain*, 9-11; C.F.G Lorenz, C. Krijnen and J. Umlauf, *Wahrheit oder Gewinn? Über die Ökonomisierung von Universität und Wissenschaft*. Würzburg, 2011, 53-68; See

was criticized for in its Communications as well, although its documents are much more balanced.

The development of the EHEA and its related aims should be realized by coordinating national policies through intergovernmental co-operation, 'together with those of non-governmental European organisations with competences on higher education'. This format of 'ownership' is the consequence of the way the role of universities is given credit, referring to the Bologna *Magna Charta Universitatum*, and stressing 'Universities' independence and autonomy (to) ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge'.<sup>110</sup>

## Ownership

The document brought (or at least intended to bring) the university world, which had become an ally of the European Commission due to the ERASMUS, TEMPUS and SOCRATES programmes additional funding, closer to the national governments and its agendas again. Of course, the two European Rector's Conferences will not have felt employed, having been so much involved in both preparing the text and the two days' conference as members of the Steering Committee. Their membership played a major role on the first day of the conference (18 June 1999) hosted and organised by the University of Bologna at which the Trends Report was presented and discussed. The outcomes of the discussions were reported on the second day, which was hosted by the Italian Ministry of Education, and ended in signing the Declaration by 29 sovereign states.<sup>111</sup> ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe had to invite itself to the event.<sup>112</sup>

It has to be concluded on the basis of their attitudes and behaviour, that national governments used 'Bologna' to try to reduce the competence space of the European Commission by offering themselves more elbowroom in the field of higher education again. Tried, because in the following years, they proved not to be able to run the process without the support (and the infrastructure) of the EU. In practice, the countries only committed themselves to an intergovernmental and fully voluntary process, respecting national sovereignty. By involving the

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also: Hans Pechar, The Decline of an Academic Oligarchy. The Bologna Process and 'Humboldt's Last Warrior', in: Adrian Curaj, Peter Scott, Lazăr Vlasceanu and Lesley Wilson, eds., *European Higher Education at the Crossroads. Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms.*, 613-614.

<sup>110</sup> Bologna Declaration 1999 – European Ministers for Higher Education, *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education*. Bologna 19 June 1999. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100210/ministerial-conference-bologna-1999.html>

<sup>111</sup> Elise Hackl, *Towards a European Area of Higher Education*, 24.

<sup>112</sup> *Student Göteborg Declaration*, 25 March 2001 – Göteborg, Sweden. Retrieved from: <http://www.uma.es/ficha.php?id=5510>

EFTA and candidate or accession countries they stipulated that Bologna was indeed outside the realm of the EU.<sup>113</sup> The additional bonus of involving so many countries – and therefore systems with quite different traditions – was that it would be easier to dodge in cases of differences of opinion between parties involved. From that perspective, the Bologna initiative – as well as Sorbonne – can also be perceived as creating an artificial contrast with EU policies.

Nevertheless, something remarkable and probably for many unexpected happened as an outcome of the preparation and actual signing of the Bologna Declaration. The topic of higher education gained momentum in the six years thereafter. The initiative was able to raise great appeal and enthusiasm among stakeholders, in particular national authorities and national Rectors Conferences. In all signatory countries entities were set up to deal with the document, although the level and role of these differed. The feeling to be sitting at the steering wheel of a reform process that had to take place or was taking place anyway – at both European and national level – will have helped. For university management it was important that the Declaration cleared the ground for obtaining more autonomy by acknowledging the independent role of universities. Revealing in this respect is the explanatory document of the Bologna Declaration prepared by the two European Rectors' Conferences in which in euphoric terms the role of the document as well as the universities is highlighted. Regarding the universities: 'It is therefore clear that higher education institutions have a unique opportunity to shape their own European future and play a crucial role in the development and implementation of the Bologna process'. Ownership of the follow-up process was clearly felt.<sup>114</sup> Regarding the role of the document, one of the overarching headings states: 'The Bologna Declaration is not just a political statement, but a binding commitment to an action programme'. This was overplaying the actual situation, because by using the term *binding* – having legal connotation – confusion was fuelled; in particular, because on the cover the authors expressed their gratitude to the European Commission for 'its support and its willingness to disseminate this document'. Was this strategic behaviour, wishful thinking or just clumsiness from the Rectors' Conferences? It must have made Commission officials smile.

Regarding the 'success' of the Declaration, parallel developments played a role. Although in general there was optimism about the state of the EU economy and its positive macro-economic outlook at the start of the new millennium,

<sup>113</sup> This argument is supported by Ruth Keeling, *The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: The European Commission's Expanding Role in Higher Education Discourse*, in: *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, June 2006, 207.

<sup>114</sup> *The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation*, prepared by Confederation of EU Rector's Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE), published on 29 February 2000.



following a clear dip in the preceding decade in particular in its first half<sup>115</sup>, there was at the same time serious concern about the high unemployment rate. At the beginning of 2000 more than 20 million people in the EU member states were unemployed (9.2%). To compare: in January 2016 this number was 21.8 million people (8.9%) after having been at a rate of 12% in 2013.<sup>116</sup> Also in relation to its enlargement, the EU was confronted with a number of serious challenges, in particular the necessity felt to transfer towards a knowledge-based society in a globalization economy. In a special EU Council of Ministers meeting held in Lisbon in March 2000 the Lisbon Strategy was announced for the decade to come, to make the EU ‘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’. Although the emphasis was on information technology and research and development as necessary initiators for reform, it was also stipulated that Europe should invest in its people by adapting its education and training systems with a focus on new basic skills, development and fostering mobility of students and staff, removing obstacles in this respect, recognition of qualifications and periods of studies and training. Although covering many of its objectives, the Bologna Process was not mentioned in the document.<sup>117</sup> This makes sense, because the Commission had no ownership, nor authority regarding the Bologna Process, having been largely bypassed as has been shown. Nevertheless, there seemed to be consensus that Lisbon boosted the initiative of the 29 signatories.<sup>118</sup>

The Lisbon Strategy also re-introduced a ‘new’ model for cooperation (introduced originally in 1992 in the context of the Maastricht Treaty), the so-called ‘Open Method of Coordination’ meant to spread best practices and achieving greater convergence for helping Member States to ‘progressively develop their own policies’. It features read as a blue print for the way the Bologna Process would be organized, applying a ‘fully decentralised approach ... in line with the principle of subsidiarity’: fixing guidelines; specific timetables for achieving the

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<sup>115</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, *European Economy, The EU Economy: 2000 Review*. No.71. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000: [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/pages/publication1716\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/pages/publication1716_en.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> EUROSTAT data. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics).

<sup>117</sup> Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000; Presidency Conclusions. Retrieved from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm)

<sup>118</sup> Susan L. Robertson, *The Bologna Process Goes Global: A Model, Market, Mobility, Brain Power or State Building Strategy?* Invitational paper to ANPED’s Annual Conference, October 2008, 3; Ruth Keeling, *The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: The European Commission’s expanding role in higher education discourse*, in: *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 203-223.

goals; establishing quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks; periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes. Even the expression ‘taking stock’ was used, which would become an important reference in the Bologna Process.<sup>119</sup> In the next chapter the model is discussed in more detail and compared to other governing concepts.

In the meantime, the educational unit of the Commission had obtained its own Directorate in ‘Education and Culture’ as part of the Romano Prodi Commission, which took office in September 1999. The first Commissioner Vivianne A. Reding representing the smallest EU country of Luxembourg was a clear indication of its low prestige in the pick order of Directorate Generals and was at the same time a clear signal not to show too much ambition. As before, the unit kept publishing analytical reports and showing the way forward, now supported by a number of Council initiatives and decisions. First of all, the Lisbon Council meeting, but also the one in Nice which took place a half a year later agreed on an action plan for mobility of both students and teachers. This was half a year before the Bologna follow-up meeting of ministers took place in Prague in May 2001.

In March 2002 at the Barcelona Council meeting the Lisbon objectives were made more concrete, by focusing on the need for excellence. It resulted in a Communication – meant for debate – *The role of universities in the Europe of Knowledge*, published one year later. It was the first EU document in more than ten years that reflected explicitly on the topic of universities and confirmed the commitment of the Commission ‘to support and help to foster the Bologna process’ in the setting of the much wider Lisbon Strategy. This implied that the focus was on the knowledge society and economy and from this perspective outlined the challenges of the universities being perceived as unique entities, to contribute to the excellence agenda; an agenda combining the efforts in teaching and research and urged to strengthen internationalization, cooperation with industry and diversification and specialization of knowledge development and interdisciplinarity.<sup>120</sup> The expressed need for more scientific and technical education to be able to compete with the other large economies, triggered a response from the European University Association (EUA) by stating that ‘promoting cultural and social innovation is as important as the purely scientific and technical progress’. The EUA, resulting from the merger in 2001 of the two European Rector’s Conferences, identified two interrelated prerequisites to play the role defined by the EU for the research universities: on the one hand governmental support and

<sup>119</sup> Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000; Presidency Conclusions

<sup>120</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission, The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge* COM(2003) 58 final/ 05.02.2003. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52003DC0058&from=EN>

significant additional funding and on the other the understanding of higher education of the ‘need for change through strengthening their capacity for, and the implementation of strategic reforms’. The main message of the Communication, however, was to spend the available funds more efficiently by profiling of universities to develop sufficient critical mass; one of the conditions to become – in the wording of the Commission – ‘a world reference’.<sup>121</sup> This was one year (2003) before the first edition of the Shanghai-Jiao Tong University ranking, nowadays named the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) was published, which confirmed the image that US universities were doing a better job.

With the fresh experience of the Sorbonne Declaration and Bologna Declaration (preparation) discussions in mind, the Commission decided to keep a low profile regarding the further development of the Bologna follow-up process from 1999. It was well aware appeasement would be a better strategy than drumming its own agenda. It showed real craftsmanship and a professional attitude by the European *fonctionnaires* responsible for developing EU policies, in particular Peter van der Hijden and his director for higher education, David Coyne. By supporting the process through EU supplementary activities and by facilitating it financially the Commission was able to position itself again. It would pay for the EUA Trends Reports, the involvement of the student representation, the rapporteurs for preparing the Ministerial meetings and partly for participation in official Bologna seminars.

## In conclusion

In retrospect the signing of the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declaration from which the Bologna Process would develop, were bold and intriguing initiatives in which different actors played a remarkable role. First of all, the four signatories of the Sorbonne Declaration, surpassing all earlier European Commission initiatives relating to higher education, aimed to develop a strategy which should offer leverage to reform their own national systems founded in quite different cultural and educational traditions.

They all had their own agenda to reform the national higher education sector, but were bound at the same time by lack of means to finance their vastly

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<sup>121</sup> European University Association, *Response to the Communication from the Commission. The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (May 2003); The Commission reference is the more than 4000 higher education institutions in Europe; according to the EUA only up to 1000 of these are real universities issuing doctoral degrees. In comparison the USA holds the same number of higher education of which 550 issue doctoral degrees and of which 125 are identified as ‘research universities’.

growing (number of) higher education institutions. Three of them, the ministers of education of France, Germany and Italy, wanted changes but fully understood they were fighting elephants. Therefore, the initiative of Allègre was very much welcomed by the numbers two and three; the fourth, the UK minister for Higher Education went along for strategic reasons.

All four were trying to overcome resistance against change thought necessary. They all realized that a good balance had to be found between the claimed autonomy of the higher education institutions (Magna Charta Universitatum) and their academics ('academic freedom') and the need to prepare students better for their role in society, as had been outlined in a number of European Commission 'Communications' in the years previous to the celebration of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sorbonne University.

Although other EU countries were upset by the initiative, which they initially read in terms of EU policy making, after digesting the message of the Sorbonne Declaration, they had all reasons to join the initiative. Also these countries had to deal with issues comparable to those of the four largest educational systems described in this chapter. Challenges ranged from making their systems more competitive in relation to neighbouring countries and other world regions to the fear of being left out in the development of a European Higher Education Area, which might marginalize their own higher education institutions in the European and global theatre.

It was also difficult not to agree with the issues raised in the Sorbonne Declaration intended to strengthen European higher education in a global context. The items were covered in more detail in the Bologna Declaration of which the driver was made crystal clear: compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education in Europe and international – meaning global – competitiveness framed in six objectives. In other words, developing instruments to facilitate the internal market and as an instrument for brain gain (at least preventing brain drain).

It were in particular Austria, acting president of the EU, and Germany that offered direction after the signing of the Sorbonne Declaration. They obtained support from the two European Rectors' Conferences, which also understood that initiatives for reform should be welcomed. Through tactical manoeuvring of the Directors-General for Higher Education of the EU member states the Sorbonne roadmap, formulated as a wish list, was transferred into a plan of more concrete actions. Comparing the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations the latter is more explicitly economically driven. It makes the impression of a 'mechanic' document, which can be perceived as Eurocentric, and pays no attention to the academic and student community and 'bildung', the joy of learning. This was a missed opportunity, because as the Sorbonne document stipulated that the ultimate purpose was and should be to develop a framework for *teaching and learn-*

*ing*, a phrase that cannot be found in the Bologna Declaration. It was not really understood – or at least not expressed – that for a real modernisation of European higher education it would be required to reform the curricula on offer as the European Commission had stipulated in a number of Communications and papers.

The directors-general found excellent partners in the two Rectors' Conferences, by involving them as members of the Steering Committee and giving them full visibility at the Bologna Conference where the Declaration was signed. Nevertheless, it is significant that the core subject of the whole undertaking, the student, was not involved at all in the 12 months used to prepare it. ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe had to ring the doorbell themselves to be let in. A clear mistake, that was not repeated.

As problematic is that the initiators of both Declarations kept the European Commission and therefore the European Union at a distance. Without all their work established in the years preceding the two conferences and the signing of the Declarations, there would not have been any basis for the Declarations. Is the contribution of the EU at least mentioned in the first Declaration, it is not at all in the Bologna Declaration. As we have seen this was no accident. Also the Council of Europe as one of the initiators of the Lisbon Recognition convention and the Diploma Supplement is not given any credit.

With the exception of reorganising the European higher education sector in cycles to align with the most prominent model in the world, no original ideas were included in the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations. They absorbed initiatives from others, the Council of Europe, UNESCO and in particular the European Commission/ European Union. The European Commission, initially, manoeuvred in a rather awkward position, proved able to reposition itself by choosing modesty. In practice the Commission would play a major role from the very start of what would become the Bologna Process by not only financing, but also initiating and facilitating major parts of the two-pillar structure: the common framework, including the creation of dedicated organisations such as ENQA, and the common tools. It would prove also to be one of the main intellectual contributors to the Process in the following years.

That the countries involved were dealing with the very sensitive issue of (higher) education, which was kept outside the European Community/ European Union treaties since it was felt to be the main responsibility of the nation state, can be deduced from the fact that the choice was made for a voluntary intergovernmental model, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. In theoretical terms it opted for the concept of policy convergence, while in reality looking for harmonisation of systems, guidelines and standards by initiating one architecture based on cycles, one agreed credit system (ECTS) and common rules for quality assurance and recognition of studies. In the years covered by this

chapter ministers, civil servants but also the European Commission kept stressing that they strived for conversion, with harmonisation and unification being too much identified with the EU government structure and the development of the internal market.

Although choosing and applying the term ‘convergence’ as a reflection of policy making, there are no indications that the actors involved in the Declarations and the Bologna Process were very much informed about theoretical concepts related to that term in both directions, broader ones such as policy diffusion – focussing on process – and policy transfer (also giving attendance to the role of actors) and stricter ones such as harmonisation, unification and standardisation. If they were at all, the last set was related to EU integration policies and concepts, and seen as something to avoid. The choice was made for the term ‘convergence’, an analytical concept meant to measure similarities in change. Clearly not the best choice and an obvious compromise between the sensitivity of decades of discussions about the role of the European Commission in higher education and the wish to align. A choice which became obsolete with the endorsement of the Lisbon Strategy, confirming that the European Commission had to have a role to play in higher education policy making after the EU Council asked for the adaptation of education and training systems at European level to support the overall objective of making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world after years of economic stagnation. In the outside world the Bologna Process would be perceived as part of the European integration process anyway, as the publication in the New York Times, prepared in the last months of 2002, showed.

## 2. The Bologna Process on the March Towards a European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Success or Failure?

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### ABSTRACT

*After the signing of the Bologna Declaration an organisational structure was developed which transformed the document into a Process. This was fully in place in 2003 at the Berlin Ministerial conference. These years showed full commitment and involvement of the organisations representing the higher education sector, as consultative members. In 2001 the European Commission obtained full membership of the Process, as the paymaster of its activities. It kept a low profile throughout, so as not to upset the countries involved. Around 2003 a governance concept was embraced in the Open Method of Coordination, which was initiated in an EU context by the Lisbon Strategy. The first six years of the Process resulted in two main outcomes: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and a Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Both underpinned the three cycle system which would slowly be implemented in all countries involved in the Process, though not in a uniform way. Actually, in 2005 the Process reached its peak by completing and endorsing the toolbox of instruments required for implementing the political ambitions in higher education institutions. The next phase should be devoted to the actual implementation. Expecting this would take more time than five years, it was concluded that the original aim to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 would not be met. Nevertheless, at the time of the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve follow-up conference (2009) the Bologna Process was perceived as a rather successful undertaking by both in- and outsiders. This notwithstanding criticisms from individual academics, in particular from the Humanities and Social Sciences fields, for interfering in the academic freedom of higher education institutions and their academics, and for being driven mostly by economic motives. However, since its ten years' celebration, the image of a successful Bologna Process has been overturned. At the next two Ministerial follow-up conferences in 2012 and 2015, it could not but be noted on the basis of progress reports, that the establishment of a EHEA was not coming much closer. In 2014 a number of countries, the key consultative member organisations as well as the European Commission, concluded that the process was stuck. One of the reasons was the failure to implement the student-centred approach in higher education institutions, a focal point from 2009 onward and perceived as a condition for making the aimed for reforms a reality. Another, probably even more fundamental one, was that many countries did not implement the key agreed objectives of the Bologna Declaration – which decided the (development of the) foundation of the EHEA – in a consistent and constructive way.*

## Introduction

By announcing in the Bologna Declaration that a follow-up meeting would take place in two years' time to 'assess the progress achieved and the new steps to be taken', a process was started, which would require some sort of organisational structure. It is this part of the process in particular that has drawn a lot of interest from researchers, for the strength and effectiveness of a process can be derived to a large extent from its organizational set-up.<sup>122</sup> In the first years the countries did not really have the notion of belonging to a group, the 'Bologna Club' as it was dubbed later.<sup>123</sup> As expressed by a Czech official involved in the organization of the Prague meeting (2001): 'I always thought that no one was really aware of what the ministers had signed in Bologna ... most of all the ministers themselves. The consciousness of being involved in a process appeared later on'.<sup>124</sup>

In line with the preparatory phase of the Bologna Declaration and the perceptions about the different responsibilities and roles of the stakeholders involved the lightest non-formal structure imaginable was chosen. Based on two entities, it was agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education in September 1999 to establish a 'follow-up group' or 'steering group' and a 'consultative group' or 'enlarged (follow-up) group'. The first group comprised a rotating system of chairs based on the EU Presidency model, involving the countries successively holding the presidency until the next meeting of Ministers of Education (Finland, Portugal, France and Sweden) plus the organizer of the meeting, the two Rectors' Conferences and the European Commission. The second group consisted of the 'national contact points' of the signatory countries, which role it also was to report on national progress. The number of meetings that took place in 2000 show, that although the structure – which was not made public at the time<sup>125</sup> – to coordinate activities was loose, it was nevertheless taken seriously: three meetings for the small group and two for the full group. The full group was extended in the same year with three observers – besides the EUA -, involving the stakeholders EU-RASHE, ESIB and last but not least the Council of Europe.<sup>126</sup> A fair correction

<sup>122</sup> A selection of relevant publications which offer insight in the debate is offered in footnote 9.

<sup>123</sup> The term is applied in *Bologna Process between Prague and Berlin. Report to the Ministers of Education of the signatory countries*. Berlin, September 2003. General Rapporteur: Prof. Pavel Zgaga, 7,12.

<sup>124</sup> Pauline Ravinet, *When constraining links emerge from loose cooperation: Mechanisms of involvement and building of a follow-up structure in the Bologna process*, Third International Euredocs Conference (Sub-theme 1) Centre for Higher Education Research University, University of Kassel 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June 2006, 16.

<sup>125</sup> Pauline Ravinet, *When constraining links emerge from loose cooperation*, 17.

<sup>126</sup> European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) applied for Consultative Membership in the Bologna Follow-Up Group in 2005. See EHEA website retrieved



given the role of the Council of Europe in the past and the fact that the two Rector's Conferences were in the end just membership organisations, so why single them out? All EU countries except Greece could report in October at the regular meeting of EU Directors of Higher Education that they had initiated reforms to introduce a two-cycle system.<sup>127</sup>

This chapter aims to find an answer to the question whether the strategy chosen to develop the initial and additional objectives of what became a Process, delivered the results the ministers and their advisers agreed upon. The scholarly approach applied here is by reporting on and analysing of the (outcomes of the) many seminars, actions and many documents and reports which were initiated and prepared over time. For the sake of transparency, the author of this book attended a number of the (key) events and /or was (directly and indirectly) involved in some of the actions that played a role in the process.

## Deciding on a governance model for the Process

Step-by-step the organizational arrangements supporting the process obtained some structure. The 'follow-up' group commissioned a special report to be prepared by the Portuguese Pedro Lourtie for the follow-up meeting. It also planned three international seminars – covering the credit issue, bachelor level degrees and transnational education – and decided to decouple the academic Forum from the ministerial conference. Having the academic conference to take place before the ministerial meeting can be understood as a sign of downgrading the prominent role of the Rectors' Conferences in the process so far, also because the perspective was widened by means of involving more non-governmental organisations. On the other hand – the actual argument that was used was that having meetings of stakeholder groups time before the actual summits allowed for better preparation and more structured input. This was confirmed in the structure endorsed in Prague and included in its Communiqué. At the same time, the European Commission was praised in that text for its 'constructive assistance' and was rewarded by giving it – without any explanation – full membership. It seems that it was the Swedish Presidency that pushed for it, while the French kept opposing. However, in 2000, Claude Allègre was replaced by Jack Lang as Minister of Education, and the French gave up their position which, according to an EU official – in a nutshell – had been 'to find a European solution to tackle

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15 October 2018: [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/20050412-13\\_Mondorf/67/5/BFUG5\\_6e\\_ENQA\\_579675.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/20050412-13_Mondorf/67/5/BFUG5_6e_ENQA_579675.pdf)

<sup>127</sup> Elsa Hackl, *Towards a European Area of Higher Education: Change and Convergence in European higher education*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. EUI work papers, No. 2001/9. San Domenico (Fi): European University Institute, April 2001, 29.

domestic problems, not a process to bring educational policy on the European agenda as a policy field'.<sup>128</sup> A month after the Prague summit Tessa Blackstone – the last of the Sorbonne signatories left – was appointed Minister of State for the Arts (Culture, Media and Sports) following UK general elections.<sup>129</sup>

The format of the double group was kept but changed in membership terms. Established was a Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), chaired by the EU Presidency at the time, including representatives – that is senior officials of the Ministries of Education – of all signatory countries plus the Commission, which would have overall responsibility for the Process. The other group, named Preparatory Group contained representatives (also senior officials) of the countries hosting the previous and the next ministerial meeting, two EU Member States and two non EU member states to be elected from the BFUG, the EU presidency at the time and the Commission. It would be chaired by Germany, being the organizer of the ministerial conference in 2003. The two Rectors' Conferences, which had been merged at their Salamanca Convention into one organization, the European University Association (EUA), representing the research universities, obtained the status of formal observer to be consulted in the follow-up work, together with the much smaller European Association of institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) as representation of the universities of applied sciences, the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the Council of Europe.

The organizational structure as we still have it today, was agreed at the ministerial meeting in Berlin (2003). It carefully balanced the different roles and responsibilities. The overall authority laid with the Follow-up group, chaired by the EU Presidency with the next host of the ministerial meeting as the vice-chair, for 'overall steering' the process and for preparing the next meeting. The Preparatory Group was renamed 'Board', and composed in such a way that countries could only be a member for a fixed period. Its role was limited to overseeing the work in the time between the meetings of the Follow-up group. The ministers returned to the EU troika model, the Presidency chairing the meetings of both the Follow-up group and the Board. Three countries would be selected for one year. The number of consultative 'members' was brought up to five, including now UNESCO/CEPES. The Follow-up group confirmed the German initiative to install a temporary secretariat to support both Group and Board, during the preparatory phase. Only in Leuven-Louvain, at the 6<sup>th</sup> ministerial meeting in 2009 the structure was slightly amended by introducing a double rotating chair of the EU presidency and a non-EU member state. The Member states in the Board were based on a double Troi-

<sup>128</sup> Kerstin Martens, Carolin Balzer, Reinhold Sackmann and Ansgar Wexmann, *Comparing governance of international organisations: The EU, the OECD and educational policy*, TranState working papers, No. 7, 2004, 8.

<sup>129</sup> Baroness Blackstone. Retrieved from <http://www.parliament.uk/biographies/lords/baroness-blackstone/3561>. Last accessed on 24 November 2017.

ka-system of EU and non-EU states, a total of 6, which offered a bit more stability with membership for three periods of six months.

The model endorsed in Berlin should guarantee that the Board would not overplay its role.<sup>130</sup> However by giving the Commission as well as the organizing country of the next meeting a fixed position and by involving the consultative members in the Board that were appointed in Prague, the signatories took a calculated risk on the narrative that might develop. This model upgraded the position of these four consultative members attending both the meetings of Board and Follow-up Group and thus becoming – together with the Commission – the institutional memory of the process.<sup>131</sup> That countries kept a close eye on the (informal) power balance is shown by the fact there was never any support for installing a permanent secretariat. In 2010 the Council of Europe proposed to take this role on board, but it met with strong opposition of the signatory countries.<sup>132</sup>

In 2003, with the notion in mind that a serious process was developing, it is fully understandable that countries wanted to keep full autonomy to define their own national policies. Although many authors have stressed that joining the process was without much risk, national governments were very much aware that reforming their higher education sector could and probably would be a costly and probably in many of its aspects not affordable affair – if not for the governments themselves then at least for the higher education institutions involved. Governments had to deal with a number of challenges with budgetary consequences and were answerable to their national parliaments, more than to their colleagues in the Process.

## Theoretical considerations

Around the same period (2001-2002), the Bologna Process partners had embraced the ‘Open Method of Coordination’ (OMC) as their preferred model

<sup>130</sup> See in this context: Paul Furlong, *The Bologna Process: Informal governance in the Wider Europe*. Paper presented at the UACES Annual Conference, Cambridge, 5 September 2011, 5.

<sup>131</sup> One of the observations in the publication: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission), *The Bologna Process Independent Assessment, The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area. Volume 1 Detailed assessment report*. Prepared by CHEPS; University of Bath; INCHER-Kassel; ECOTEC; IHF; Nuffic. Brussels, January 2010, 95, 97. See for the UK perception: The UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process*, s.a., 2005.

<sup>132</sup> BFUG Secretariat – F. Profit, *Possible arrangements for the future secretariat. Version 19/10/2016*. Retrieved from: [http://media.ehea.info/file/20161024\\_Podgorica/75/2/Board\\_SK\\_ME\\_51\\_9\\_PermanentSecretariat\\_642752.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/20161024_Podgorica/75/2/Board_SK_ME_51_9_PermanentSecretariat_642752.pdf). See also: Committee of Ministers, *Contribution of the Council of Europe to the development of the European Higher Education Area*, 16 September 2010. Retrieved from: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=12533&lang=en>

of governance<sup>133</sup>, following the Lisbon Strategy of the EU Council of Ministers, which was introduced at the end of the previous chapter. As explained there, it suited the members well to fully respect the intergovernmental character of the process and to presume a limited role of the European Commission. This became very clear with the introduction of the so-called Stocktaking Reports and the request to make national action plans for recognition of studies. Both were introduced as action points in the Berlin Communiqué of 2003. The concept is based on mechanisms of soft law, that is benchmarking and sharing best practices, which result in peer pressure. The process starts with identifying and agreeing common ground in a particular field which results in shared goals. These goals are the basis for developing national legislation on the basis of a set of guidelines and indicators. The outcomes of this process are monitored and evaluated again at international level which may result in ‘naming and shaming’.<sup>134</sup> The fear for reputation loss is an important negative driver in this respect. However, probably more important and a more positive accelerator is that the process should offer convincing arguments for policy change and encourage compliance with the original goals at implementation level.

At the time the OMC was perceived as a new instrument of governance, although in reality it had already been applied in 1992 in the Maastricht Treaty for the purpose of economic coordination and in 1997 in the Luxembourg Process or European Employment Strategy (EES).<sup>135</sup> In the Lisbon Strategy it was meant to identify and promote social policies. By applying the OMC in the context of the Bologna Process in fact an EU policy-making regulating instrument was taken on board to achieve convergence of policies through soft governance. Being an acknowledged EU instrument, the OMC process was from 2001 – as one of 13 instruments available by 2007 in the EU – also used by the Directorate Gen-

<sup>133</sup> Ase Gornitzka, *The Open Method of Coordination as practice – A watershed in European education policy?* Working paper No. 16. ARENA, Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, December 2006.

<sup>134</sup> Amaral, Alberto and Amélia Veiga, *The European Higher Education Area: Various Perspectives on the Complexities of a Multi-Level Governance system*, in: *Educação, Sociedade & Culturales*. No. 36, 2012, pp. 25-48.

<sup>135</sup> European Commission, *The birth of the European Employment Strategy: the Luxembourg process (November 1997)*. In the summary it is stated: ‘The EES introduces a new working method, “the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)”. This system creates a balance between the responsibility of the Community and that of the Member States (the subsidiarity principle), establishes quantified common targets to be achieved at Community level, and puts into place Community-level surveillance encouraged by pooling experience. The OMC facilitates policy debates at different levels followed by an integrated approach: actions taken in the field of employment must be consistent with related fields such as social policy, education, the tax system, enterprise and regional development.’ Retrieved on 21 July 2018 from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:c11318>

eral Education and Culture to strengthen its position in policy making in the field of higher education.<sup>136</sup>

This fitted well in a development that was taking place anyway, although (initially) interrupted by the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations. Though higher education – as stipulated before – is not part of the EU treaties, and is traditionally perceived as a prime responsibility of the nation state and a strategic instrument for nation building, promoting national identity and educating new generations to take leadership in all domains of society, from around 2000 it was widely accepted that the higher education agenda is strongly influenced by (economic and social) global developments as well as by European Union policy making. The European Commission policy papers published since the mid-1980s and in particular the Lisbon Strategy of 2001 are obvious indicators of this observation. The (voluntary) establishment of a European Higher Education Area as the main goal of the Bologna Process is another indicator in this respect.

By selecting the OMC as the governance approach a choice was made for a one dimensional or horizontal model, limiting it to policy making at the level of and between governments. Defined as a form of intergovernmental policy-making it does not result in binding (EU) legislative measures and it does not require countries to introduce or amend their laws. Having the introduction of a two-cycle system as one of its main aims, which would require accommodation of legislation for sure in nearly all countries involved, not immediately an obvious choice.

The Open Method of Coordination fit in a wider set of approaches which came up as new modes of (understanding) governance as part of European/EU policy making. Another one is multi-level governance/ multi-actor governance although initially developed as an analytical framework, not a practical governing model.<sup>137</sup> The multi-level governance theoretical framework – developed in the 1990s – was inspired by studies on the European integration process, in particular the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and meant to get more grip on EU-gov-

<sup>136</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service, *The Open Method of Coordination*. Retrieved from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-AaG-542142-Open-Method-of-Coordination-FINAL.pdf>

See also: Ase Gornitzka, *The Open Method of Coordination as practice – A watershed in European education policy?* Working paper No. 16. ARENA, Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, December 2006; Amélia Viegas and Alberto Amaral, Policy Implementation Tools and European Governance, in Alberto Amaral, Guy Neave, Christine Musselin and Peter Maassen, eds., *European Integration and the Governance of Higher Education and Research*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2009, pp. 133-157 discuss the (lack of) effectiveness of the OMC as a means to reach results.

<sup>137</sup> Pedrag Lazetic, Managing the Bologna Process at the European Level: institution and actor dynamics, in: *European Journal of Education*. Special Issue: Ten Years of the Bologna Process – ‘What Future?’ Volume 45, Issue 4, pp. 549-562, December 2010.

ernance.<sup>138</sup> Initially it did not include higher education policy as a topic of analysis, but as a result of the Bologna Process and Lisbon Strategy it does now.<sup>139</sup> The concept is based on the assumption that governance competences in today's world are no longer monopolized by national governments but are shared amongst a variety of actors/ institutions which cover different levels of involvement. According to the concept sub-national authorities have a significant impact on policy making in particular in a EU/European setting. Interests are channelled through direct and indirect networks linking sub-national, national and supra-national levels, presuming also direct links between the sub- and supra levels bypassing the state. This implies mutual dependency of different actors, without presuming a hierarchical relationship. The consequence is a heterogeneity of actor involvement.<sup>140</sup> Contrary to the convergence theory the emphasis in the concept of multi-level governance lies on diversity, that is the diverse interests of the actors/institutions involved in (solving) a particular issue. The variety is framed by respecting formal lines of decision making. In the case of the EU its different institutions play a central role by organising interaction of opinions to find agreement.

There is a close relationship between multi-level governance and the theoretical framework of new institutionalism. New institutionalism sees institutions as critical variables in policy making by structuring forces and therefore influencing results, but at the same time constraining political actors. It distinguishes three types, economic/rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism and historical institutionalism, of which the latter is most appropriate in the context of the Bologna Process. This is because one of its main features is that it includes formal and informal institutions, which not only rationalise actor behaviour but also impact on the actual formation of policies as a result of dynamics it creates. In this case it perceives the Bologna Process as being an arena

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<sup>138</sup> Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks are perceived as the founders of the concept of multi-level governance. Their theoretical reflections were combined in the publication Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks, *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*, Lanham, etc.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, which is seen as a key publication of this approach. The book is preceded by publication of the same authors, e.g.: G. Marks, Structural policy and multi-level governance in the EC, in: A. Cafruny and G. Rosenthal (eds.), *The state of the European Community. Vol. 2, The Maastricht debates and beyond*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993, pp. 391–410 and L. Hooghe, *Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi-level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

<sup>139</sup> Simona Piattoni, *The Theory of Multi-level Governance. Conceptual, Empirical, and Normative Challenges* (Oxford 2010) devotes a complete chapter in her study (no. 8, pp. 151-173) on Higher Education policy. See also: Alberto Amaral and Amélia Veiga, The European Higher Education Area: Various Perspectives on the Complexities of a Multi-Level Governance system, in: *Educação, Sociedade & Culturales*, No. 36, 2012, pp. 25-48.

<sup>140</sup> Anil Awesti, The European Union, New Institutionalism and Types of Multi-Level Governance, in: *Political Perspectives EPRU* 2007 Issue 2. No. 8, pp. 1-23..

in itself.<sup>141</sup> It presupposes that equal weight is given to formal and informal rules, procedures, norms and conventions. It also assumes that institutions influence actors' perceptions and preferences, but do not determine these. Actors are assumed to be guided by both self-interest and normative goals, which should lead to calculus behaviour. Historical institutionalism is most of all interested in the response of different national entities towards similar challenges.<sup>142</sup> In the setting of this publication, multi-level/ multi-actor level governance and historical institutionalism – although acknowledging its reductionist and teleologic character – should be seen as concepts being complementary to each other for understanding the (limitations) of the – voluntary – Bologna Process.

### Next steps

Having these governing models and theoretical considerations in mind, let us return to the preparation of the first follow-up conference. The report *Furthering the Bologna Process* of Lourtie, a later deputy minister, proved to be of great value to prepare the text for the Prague Communiqué in 2001, because it summarized in 106 paragraphs the state of affairs, covering also the conclusions of the first three 'Bologna seminars' scheduled by the steering group and two conventions. One of these was organized jointly by the two Rectors' Conferences in Salamanca and resulted in the Salamanca Convention of European Higher Education Institutions. The second convention, organised by ESIB, had the Student Göteborg Declaration as its outcome.

The Salamanca Convention organized its discussions around 6 themes, which resulted in 13 theses and a conclusion. The leading principle was 'freedom with responsibility', which should be based on trust between a government and its universities. It stated with conviction that 'European universities and their organisations are willing and capable to take the lead in the joint effort: to renovate and rejuvenate higher education; to redefine it at a European scale; to promote the employability of their graduates and the mobility of their students and staff; to further the compatibility between institutions and curricula; to assure quality in the European Higher Education Area; to be more competitive, not excluding cooperation; to address the specific difficulties of universities in certain parts of Europe'.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Anil Awesti, *The European Union*, 8-9.

<sup>142</sup> Johanna Katharina Witte, *Change of Degrees and Degrees of Change. Comparing adaptations of European Higher Education Systems in the context of the Bologna Process*. Enschede, 2006, 31-37.

<sup>143</sup> Convention of European Higher Education Institutions. Salamanca, Spain, 29-30<sup>th</sup> March 2001. Conclusions of the work of the thematic groups. Rapporteur: Prof. Dr. Konrad Os-

A very ambitious plan of action indeed, and although conditioned by appropriate funding, and reflecting the mood at the time, it clearly overestimated the impact of university leadership and underestimated the challenges ahead: convincing their faculties and academics to take this agenda on board. It was overseen by the university leaders that universities are not uniform entities, not internally, nor in comparison to each other. Therefore, the finishing statement printed in bold, that ‘European higher education institutions want to be in a position to shape their future in the European Higher Education Area. If they all want it, their message will be heard and it will happen’, seemed to fit well in the philosophy of cohabitation, but in retrospect sounds rather naïve. Nevertheless, in effect it resulted in the 8<sup>th</sup> objective of the Bologna Process, as the item ‘Higher education institutions and students’, in which the Ministers stressed the need to involve both higher education institutions and students ‘as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area’, focusing on the combination of academic quality and relevance to lasting employability. The students in their Declaration drew attention to the social dimension, which was also embraced in the 8<sup>th</sup> objective.<sup>144</sup> In the next Communiqué, that of Berlin (2003) the topic obtained a more prominent place in its preamble.<sup>145</sup> Full of ambition and self-confidence, the Communiqué added a 7<sup>th</sup> and a 9<sup>th</sup> objective in ‘Lifelong Learning’ and ‘Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area’. The latter is probably the most striking one, taking into account that the Process had just started. In the meantime, Lourtie noted many challenges, related to variety in terminology, values and concepts and lack of consensus regarding degree structures and accreditation. This is in contrast with the actual Communiqué, which manifests most of all a spirit of optimism.<sup>146</sup>

The challenges ahead are much better covered in two EUA Declarations: the Graz Declaration (2003) ‘Forward from Berlin: the Role of Universities’, and the Glasgow Declaration (2005), ‘Strong Universities for a Strong Europe’. The tone is more realistic, stipulating the many changes necessary to make political am-

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terwald, Rector, ETH Zürich Student Göteborg Convention. Göteborg, Sweden, 22-25<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>144</sup> Prague Communiqué 2001 - *Towards the European Higher Education Area. Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Prague on May 19th 2001*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100256/ministerial-conference-prague-2001.html>

<sup>145</sup> Berlin Communiqué 2003 – ‘Realising the European Higher Education Area’: Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003 [Berlin Communiqué].” Berlin: Bologna-Berlin2003 Project Team, 2003. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100938/ministerial-conference-berlin-2003.html>

<sup>146</sup> *Furthering the Bologna Process. Report to the Ministers of Education of the signatory countries*. Prague, May 2001. General Rapporteur: Prof. Pedro Lourtie. Report commissioned by the Follow-up group of the Bologna Process.



bitions real. It also highlighted that serious governmental efforts would be required to implement the agenda. While in the Salamanca Declaration the governmental role is not really addressed, in the Graz Declaration the division of roles and responsibilities between Universities and Governments is made explicit. In 10 out of the 29 statements of which the document is constructed, a governmental role is identified. What is remarkable, however, is that in none of the documents, including the Bologna Declaration and the Communiqués of Prague, Berlin, and Bergen (2005) any attention is given to the role of the teaching staff in the Process; the texts are limited to system and structural aspects only, and the role of Higher Education institutions is limited to this context.

In the Graz document the inseparable relation is stressed between ‘higher education’ and ‘research’. Two years later the link between the Bologna reforms and the research and innovation agenda of the Lisbon Agenda is made explicit in the Glasgow Declaration. The topic will be used to profile the EUA as the organisation of research-intensive universities in the years to come. The organisation succeeded in getting the doctoral studies – the third cycle – included as the 10<sup>th</sup> objective of the Process.

To return to the Prague summit (2001): as part of its preparation a second Trends Report was made. It was paid for by the European Commission – as had been the case with the first – and implemented by the EUA, which was the successor of the now combined two Rectors’ Conferences. This *Trends II study* was again based on a survey among government representatives, who were asked about the implementation of the core objectives of the Bologna Process, that is promoting mobility, employability and the attractiveness/ competitiveness of higher education. The authors of the report concluded on the basis of the responses, that the Bologna Declaration indeed had accelerated discussions, raised further awareness and confirmed and reinforced national priorities. This was perceived as its biggest strength: crystallizing major existing trends. According to the report, improving graduates employability was seen as the most important ground for reform, which was shared by the vast majority of countries.<sup>147</sup>

For *Trends 2003. Progress towards the European Higher Education Area. Bologna four years after: Steps towards sustainable reform of higher education in Europe*, a different strategy was applied, which was consistent with the Graz Convention approach, that is separating the roles of governments and universities. The president of the EUA, the Frenchman Eric Froment, made this explicit in his preface: the report ‘for the first time analyses and compares developments from the point of view of all the major actors in the process: governments, na-

<sup>147</sup> Guy Haug and Christian Tauch, *Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education (II). Follow-up Report prepared for the Salamanca and Prague Conferences of March/May 2001*. Helsinki, April 2001, 18.

tional rectors' conferences, higher education institutions and students'. It should reflect the growing importance of the full support and involvement of higher education institutions and students. The information regarding students was obtained from the national and European student associations, using surveys – as was the case with regard to the other stakeholder groups. The students would also publish their own perspective in the report *Bologna with student eyes*. Using closed questionnaires evoke a sort of 'disclaimer' from the authors of the Trends Report that the various stakeholder groups were requested 'subjective judgements regarding facts and opinions'.<sup>148</sup> For future reports it would 'be desirable to add qualitative monitoring visits and some quantitative data collection'.

In line with this 2003 Trends II report, enhancing academic quality and the employment of graduates were according to the representatives of ministries, rector's conferences but also the higher education institutions 'the two most frequently mentioned driving forces behind the Bologna Process'. Although these 'HE institutional policy makers' might in general be convinced of the added value of the Process, the authors of the Report express concern that the Process is much more involving the heads of institutions than the academics themselves. It leads to their inevitable conclusion that the EHEA will only become a reality when the process 'evolve[s] from governmental intentions and legislation to institutional processes, able to provide for the intensive exchange and mutual cooperation necessary for such a cohesion area'. This came as no surprise to the ECTS expert group that had launched the EU co-financed project *Tuning Educational Structures in Higher Education* in the autumn of 2000, which understood that involvement of higher education institutions implied not one level of decision making and implementation, but three. We will return to this initiative in chapter 6.

## Momentum

In retrospect the decisions made during the 6 years following the signing of the Bologna Declaration have proven to be of crucial importance for its success as well as the lack of it. Measured in terms of countries involved, its success is beyond doubt. Until 2003 membership of the Bologna club was limited to countries for which the 'European Community programmes Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci or Tempus-Cards are open', which again showed the intertwining with EU policies.<sup>149</sup> Only when other European countries not meeting this requirement

<sup>148</sup> European University Association, *Trends III: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area*. Prepared by Sybille Reichert and Christian Tauch, Brussels, 2003, 17.

<sup>149</sup> Prague Communiqué 2001 - *Towards the European Higher Education Area*. Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Prague on May 19th 2001. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100256/ministerial-conference-prague-2001.html>

knocked at the door after the Prague summit, it was decided after intensive discussion to change the clause in the Berlin Communiqué to countries that had signed the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe and endorsed the objectives to be implemented in their own countries. The number of countries increased from 29 signatures in Bologna, to 33 in Prague, to 40, including Russia, in Berlin, to 45 in Bergen, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and the Ukraine, to 48 in Yerevan in 2015, including now also the Central Asian state of Kazakhstan (2012) and Belarus (2015), although the latter is not a member of the Council of Europe.<sup>150</sup> By definition the extension of Bologna signatory countries led to a further widening of different (national) philosophies, values, concepts and approaches regarding higher education.

The momentum of the Process is also shown by the number of presidency conferences, and 'official' and un-official seminars that were organised during its first decade. This number grew gradually from 3 between Bologna and Prague<sup>151</sup>, to 10 between Prague and Berlin, to 14 between Berlin and Bergen. There were 9 between Bergen and London and 18 between London and Leuven-Louvain. During the period 2001-2005 the seminars focused in particular on quality assurance and accreditation, degrees (bachelor, master and doctorate and joint degrees) and qualifications structures and recognition and ECTS credits as well as the social dimension. In Berlin it was confirmed again that quality assurance, the two-cycle system and recognition of degrees and of periods of studies abroad were perceived as the core of the Process.

In particular, during the first half decade a number of these seminars were of key importance for directing the Process. Some are singled out here, because they show well how challenging it proved to be to align the structures and policies of the – growing number of – countries directly involved in the process: the Helsinki seminars on Bachelor-Level Degrees (2001) and on Master-Level Degrees (2003), the Amsterdam conference 'Working on the European Dimension of Quality' (2002) focusing on descriptors for Bachelor and Master programmes at different levels, the Copenhagen seminar 'Qualification Structures in Higher Education in Europe' (2003) and the EUA Zürich conference (2002) and Prague seminar (2003) on ECTS. The latter seminar is also of interest due to the way its recommendations were organised, doing justice – as one of the few – to the different roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the Process; opening with higher education institutions, followed by public authorities, international insti-

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<sup>150</sup> See for the full list of members and consultative members of the Bologna Process: <http://www.ehea.info/members.aspx>; see for the membership of the Council of Europe: Website Council of Europe: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/47-members-states>

<sup>151</sup> Official Bologna follow-up seminars: Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems (Leira, Portugal, 24-25 November 2000), Bachelor-Level Degrees (Helsinki, 16-17 February 2001) and Transnational Education (Malmö, 2-3 March 2001)

tutions and organisations and finally the Berlin summit. The Amsterdam and Zürich/Prague conferences/seminar show that the need for European broad descriptors for the achievement of learning at cycle level and a transfer and accumulation credit system based on student workload were widely acknowledged. Making these operational in different national contexts proved to be another matter. The Amsterdam conference prepared the groundwork for developing a Qualifications Framework for the EHEA, which the Ministers of Education asked the national states to elaborate at their Berlin summit. The conference distinguished the complementary processes of developing the so-called Dublin (general cycle) Descriptors and the Tuning Subject Area Descriptors.<sup>152</sup> More detail is offered in chapter 9, *Columbus' Egg? Qualifications Frameworks, Sectoral Profiles and Degree Programme Profiles in Higher Education*. The København seminar resulted in the call to ENQA to develop, in co-operation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB (dubbed the E4), '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'.<sup>153</sup> For both actions, working groups were set up.

The conferences and seminars were first and foremost meant for and therefore attended by representatives of ministries and European and national organisations for higher education institutions and quality assurance and accreditation; in other words, administrators most of all involved in national policy making. This is shown by the lists of participants of the many events that took place. The overlap in the group of participants in the many events led to the image of an entrenched travel club, operating in a self-defined domain.

## Degree structures

National interests, antagonisms and limitations are shown best by the discussions regarding degree structures and length of degrees. At the Bachelor-Lev-

<sup>152</sup> Marlies Leegwater<sup>1</sup> & Noël Vercruyse, *Working on the European Dimension of Quality. Report of the international conference*, Amsterdam, March 12 and 13, 2002. Also retrievable on Internet: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/020312-13\\_Quality.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/020312-13_Quality.pdf)

Marijk van der Wende & Don Westerheijden, *Report of the Conference 'Working on the European Dimension of Quality' of the Joint Quality Initiative*, Amsterdam 12–13.3.2002. Retrieved from: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/020312-13\\_Quality-2.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/020312-13_Quality-2.pdf).

<sup>153</sup> Bergan, Sjur. "Qualification Structures in European Higher Education." A report on the Danish Bologna Seminar, København, March 27 – 28, 2003. Strasbourg/København: European Higher Education Area (EHEA), 2003. Retrieved from: [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/030327-28Report\\_General\\_Rapporteur.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/030327-28Report_General_Rapporteur.pdf).

In the report, prepared by the General Rapporteur Sjur Bergan Head, Higher Education and Research Division Council of Europe also a reference is made to the Joint Quality Initiative and to Tuning as being important components for developing a European qualifications structure.

el Degrees seminar the advantages of the two-tier system were highlighted, confirming the notion that the bachelor/master structure was becoming the world standard. As a common denominator the BA should carry 180 to 240 ECTS credits reflecting three to four years of full-time study. It was also acknowledged however that different disciplines, in particular fields dealing with professional accreditation, had ‘characters of their own’ which might limit their suitability to serve a labour market on the basis of a first degree. One can think of Engineering and Medicine. In those cases, the bachelor should be seen as an intermediate qualification. This was the only sensible approach at the time given the opposition faced from regulated professions. By stipulating the flexible range from 180 to 240 ECTS credits, allowing also programmes of 210 credits, it was accepted that full conversion at European level would be an impossibility given the differences in structure and philosophy of both secondary education and higher education between countries. The master was even a tougher nut to crack. Two days of very intensive discussions in Helsinki led to another compromise that still stands today, confirming that national differences could not be overcome for political and financial reasons. The formula that slowly got form on a whiteboard surrounded by key participants was the following: ‘While master degree programmes normally carry 90 – 120 ECTS credits, the minimum requirements should amount to 60 ECTS credits at master level. As the length and the content of bachelor degrees vary, there is a need to have similar flexibility at the master level. Credits awarded should be of the appropriate profile.’<sup>154</sup> It kept countries such as the Netherlands, Flanders-Belgium, Sweden, Ireland, the UK and – at a later stage – Spain on board.

The formula is one of the ten agreed common denominators at the Helsinki seminar that were thought to define the master degree in the EHEA. It is noted in its conclusions and recommendations that degree structures as well as the perception of the two-cycle system still vary considerably between the countries taking part in the Bologna Process, though there seemed to be a tendency – based on an inventory made – to agree on a total of 300 ECTS credits as the combination of the bachelor and master degree. Although it is explicitly stated that ‘second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies’ – a line which was copied in the Berlin Communiqué – it also noted (to please some national systems) that a transition ‘to doctoral studies without the formal award of a master’s degree should be considered possible if the student demonstrates that he/she has the necessary abilities’. Furthermore, ‘there may continue to exist integrated one-tier programmes leading to master degrees’. It gives an adequate description of the

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<sup>154</sup> The Bologna Process Conference on Master-level Degrees Helsinki, Finland March 14 – 15, 2003. Conclusions and Recommendations of the Conference: [http://media.ehea.info/file/Master\\_degrees\\_Helsinki\\_2003/09/4/030314-15Helsinki\\_Results\\_576094.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/Master_degrees_Helsinki_2003/09/4/030314-15Helsinki_Results_576094.pdf)

situation as it is still stands 15 years later. During the last decennium, all European countries did indeed introduce a sequential system of three cycles, bachelor, master and doctorate, covering the vast majority of their higher education programmes, but the overall structure of a patchwork quilt could not be replaced by a more uniform model. Obtaining access to a master programme or a doctoral programme in another country continued to be a challenging experience, in particular for doctoral programmes when the condition of 300 ECTS credits is not being met.

The Berlin Ministers Conference had to cope with many contrasting perspectives regarding the progress of the Process, summarized in the report of the General Rapporteur Pavel Zgaga<sup>155</sup>, but outlined in more detail in the EUA Trends 2003 report and the ESIB *Bologna with students eyes* report for which for the latter no financial support could be obtained. Both reports are constructive but critical at the same time. The EUA report was already discussed above. The students presented a long list of concerns about the different aspects and stipulated they were as stakeholders badly informed about and involved in the decision making process at the different levels. They noted that this also seemed to be the case for higher education institutions and sometimes even ministries. ESIB approached 50 national student organisations in 37 countries, with a response from the vast majority. From these responses a general impression was raised that governments were at best only implementing those aspects that fitted well in their policies, and were offering insufficient direction towards the sector in their country. The students spoke for the first time of a 'à la carte' implementation.

Between countries differences in speed of implementation were noticed, varying from very slow to too fast. A fear was expressed for too much uniformity and loss of cultural diversity. Furthermore, it was noted that the social dimension in most countries was neglected. It was expressed that the development of an EHEA should not lead to 'Euro-centrism', a fortress of European higher education. What is important to note is that all national student unions proved to be in favour of the introduction of BA/Ma-system, although there were questions about the strategies to apply to reach this objective. Finally, concern was expressed about the way ECTS was implemented in many countries. In this respect lack of information and co-ordination between actors was noted, which resulted in a lack of recognition of studies.<sup>156</sup> Not wanting to leave the stocktaking to ESIB – renamed European Student Union (ESU) in 2007 – only, the Ministers in Berlin decided to charge the Follow-up Group with organising its own mid-term

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<sup>155</sup> *Bologna Process between Prague and Berlin. Report to the Ministers of Education of the signatory countries.* Berlin, September 2003. General Rapporteur: Prof. Pavel Zgaga.

<sup>156</sup> ESIB, *Bologna with Student-eyes* 2003, 7-11, 43, 47-49. The authors stipulate explicitly that their publication gives impressions and is not meant as a 'scientific publication'.

<http://www.esu-online.org/resources/6068/Bologna-With-Student-Eyes-2003/>

stocktaking exercise focussing on the three priorities quality assurance, two-cycle system and recognition of degrees and periods of studies.

## Major steps

In the following two years major steps were made at the European level. Two important contributions to the Process were prepared and endorsed at the Bergen 2005 summit: the ENQA report on *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and the *Overarching Framework for Qualifications in the EHEA*. A central role in developing the first report was played by the ENQA president, the Dane Christian Thune and his successor as president, the Brit Peter Williams, director of the UK Quality Assurance Agency. Their work started in October 2003 with two parallel working groups, number 1 chaired by Thune on standards for quality assurance agencies and an adequate peer review system, and number 2 chaired by Williams on an agreed set of standards for higher education institutions. Eleven agency member representatives served on the two working groups. Thune reported that the cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB had its hick-ups, and had to be organized through separate so-called E4 meetings.<sup>157</sup> The European Standards and Guidelines or, in short ESG were well received, and are currently widely applied, though not (fully) everywhere yet. In 2015 the ESG were updated.<sup>158</sup>

The ESG are so important because they are the first results of a real European-wide initiative to agree on shared rules and regulations for quality assurance and accreditation. It offers in a report of 39 pages not only detailed guidelines – which can be perceived as a ‘system’ – to organize the quality assurance processes within higher education institutions, but also a model for external quality control in terms of standards and processes as well as standards for external quality assurance agencies. The document is very much inspired by the experiences of Northern European countries, such as Denmark, the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands, all having a longer experience with internal and external quality assurance and external peer reviewing. The report announced a registrar for quality assurance agencies which was established in 2008 as the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), on the basis of a mandate of the ministers of education obtained at the London summit of 2007. Its

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<sup>157</sup> Christian Thune, *ENQA 2000–2005: From the launch of a professional network to the success in Bologna of a new association*, in: *ENQA: 10 years (2000–2010). A decade of European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education*. Helsinki, 2010, 14-15.

<http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ENQA-10th-Anniversary-publication.pdf>

<sup>158</sup> ESG 2015: [http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

first director, the German Colin Tück, was a former student member of the ESIB/ESU Bologna Process Committee.

The purpose was and is to list agencies which have demonstrated in an external review by independent experts that they comply ‘substantially’ with the ESG. Registration is a voluntary process. Discussion occurred about what ‘substantially’ implied with regard to the two leading models of application: ‘institutional quality reviewing’ and ‘degree programme quality reviewing’. The EQAR mission statement is rather broadly formulated as to ‘further the development of the European Higher Education Area by increasing the transparency of quality assurance, and thus enhancing trust and confidence in European higher education’, and is therefore not much of help to offer clarity. Anno 2018 46 quality assurance agencies from less than half (23) of the Bologna countries have been included in the Register.<sup>159</sup>

The driving force behind the development of the Framework for Qualifications, the second major contribution to the Bologna Process was Mogens Berg, expert at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Denmark. He did not have an easy job as head of ‘his’ working group (either). This group established in March 2004, consisting of 6 members representing as many countries, invited 13 experts and involved 2 consultants to assist in coping with the terms of reference set by the Bologna Follow-up group. In accordance with the Berlin Communiqué these focused most of all on national application, taking the European dimension as a reference. The tasks: ‘Identifying reference points for national frameworks of qualifications (in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile), which may assist member States in establishing their frameworks; Elaborate on an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA; Establish key principles for frameworks of qualifications, both at national and European levels’. By insisting that the workgroup should take other policy areas into account, including the EU Copenhagen Process (2003; focusing on vocational education and training) and the Lisbon Agenda, together articulated in the ‘Education and Training 2010’ activities based on the EU Council Decision of 2001, it showed again that the Bologna Process was strongly intertwined with the EU policy agenda. Although chapter 5 of the final report of the working group is devoted to this link, the core of the report is not.<sup>160</sup>

The basis for *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*, in short the QF for the EHEA, are the Dublin Descriptors which had been developed by the so-called Joint Quality Initiative, an informal group of

<sup>159</sup> Website EQAR. Retrieved 31 October 2018: <https://www.eqar.eu/register/map/?list=true>

<sup>160</sup> Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, February 2005. A total of 1000 copies were printed of the report.



ministry and quality assurance administrators, related to the Bologna Follow-up Group and ENQA member organisations. Some prior work had been done by a preparatory group which was established by the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark and the president of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. It explains why the experts/ consultants of the group were so unevenly spread over countries: 8 coming from the United Kingdom (including Scotland) and Ireland, 2 from Denmark, 1 from Sweden and 4 representing ESIB, Council of Europe, European Commission and EUA. The United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark had experience with a qualifications framework ‘modern style’, that is one based on level descriptors, instead of a structure of qualifications. In the process one serious issue occurred which was related to the composition of the group: the question whether the overarching European framework should be ECTS credit-based. It took a serious effort at one of the last meetings of the workgroup to convince many of the native English speaking experts/ consultants this should be the case. The differences in opinion found its cause in a fundamental dispute – already boiling for some time – about the formula that 60 ECTS credits reflected a workload of 1500-1800 hours per year, while a semester according to the Irish/United Kingdom system were based on 600 working hours. This allowed in the opinion of the British (the Irish were less outspoken) for the awarding of 90 ECTS credits for a one-year master of 12 months, the selling point of British education to ‘oversea students’, while according to continental ECTS experts such a programme should equal 75 ECTS credits. As it was phrased in the Trends III report: ‘This interpretation continues to be a matter of discussion between British and continental HEIs.’<sup>161</sup> Being of such strategic importance it kept influencing the British perception of the Bologna Process. In chapter 4, *Making the Jump. From a European credit transfer system towards an overarching accumulation system*, about the (further) development of ECTS, this issue is discussed in greater detail.

## Rivalry

The topic of Qualifications Frameworks also became a symbol of rivalry between the ‘Bologna Process’ and the activities of the European Commission initiated by the Council of Ministers. In the same months as the Mogens Berg group started its activities, the Council of Ministers adopted a Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the ‘Education and Training 2010’ Lisbon agenda. In this report a call was launched to develop a European Qualifications Framework to build on the Copenhagen and Bologna Processes, covering higher

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<sup>161</sup> European University Association, *Trends III*, 48.

education and vocational education and training.<sup>162</sup> At the Irish Presidency Higher Education Conference entitled ‘Towards 2010 – common themes and approaches in European policy development across higher education and vocational education and training’ in Dublin Castle (March 2004), broad support for this initiative was found. A senior European Commission official confirmed in an informal talk at the time that these policies allowed for getting some initiative back at the European Commission level in the rivalry with the national states resulting the Bologna Process. In November 2004 the European Commission established an expert group involving some of the members of Berg’s working group. It took until 2006 to launch the final version, which was adopted in 2007 by Council and European Parliament. The group that had developed the three cycle Qualifications Framework for the EHEA confirmed quickly after the launch of the competing 8 level European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning that the two frameworks were compatible for the top 4 levels of the EQF, despite concerns expressed by its members.<sup>163</sup> This was most of all a political gesture, because in reality both frameworks were built on different philosophies and parameters. A difference was also that it proved not feasible to link the EQF levels to credits. One of the reasons was that a separate credit system was being developed at the time for the vocational education and training sector, named ECVET, on the explicit wish of the Council of Ministers and pushed for by Germany and France. In the *Bergen to London 2007. Secretariat Report on the Bologna Work Programme 2005-2007*, Mogens Berg reported on behalf of his Working Group: “to avoid confusion by the existence of two overarching frameworks, it is

<sup>162</sup> “Education & Training 2010”. *The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms*. Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe, 28-29: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%206905%202004%20INIT>

<sup>163</sup> BFUGQFWG, Minutes of the Qualifications Frameworks Working Group Meeting, Budapest – 26 February 2006. Retrieved from: [http://media.ehea.info/file/WG\\_Qualifications\\_frameworks/58/9/WG-QualificationsFrameworks-Notes-BudapestFebruary2006\\_586589.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/WG_Qualifications_frameworks/58/9/WG-QualificationsFrameworks-Notes-BudapestFebruary2006_586589.pdf); QFWG/4/Madrid 20 December 2006, Notes from 4<sup>th</sup> Qualifications Frameworks Working Group meeting 15 December 2006. Copenhagen. Retrieved from: [http://media.ehea.info/file/WG\\_Qualifications\\_frameworks/59/0/WG-QualificationsFrameworks-Notes-CopenhagenDecember2006\\_586590.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/WG_Qualifications_frameworks/59/0/WG-QualificationsFrameworks-Notes-CopenhagenDecember2006_586590.pdf)

See also the letter of the chair of the working group Mogens Berg to the UK Presidency of the Bologna Process, dated 30 September 2005 in which it is stated ‘The proposed European framework for lifelong learning qualifications is different from the EHEA-framework as regards to scope and methodology. But they are not inconsistent and not incompatible’. Of special interest is the annex to this letter: ‘Note on the complementarities between the overarching framework for qualifications of the EHEA and the proposal in EU-Commission staff working document on a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF)’. In this note the communalities and differences are outlined in detail. Documents approached from the EHEA Info website. Letter: [http://media.ehea.info/file/20051012-13\\_Manchester/05/0/BFUG7\\_8a\\_WG-Qualifications-Framework-LifelongLearning\\_584050.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/20051012-13_Manchester/05/0/BFUG7_8a_WG-Qualifications-Framework-LifelongLearning_584050.pdf); Note: [http://media.ehea.info/file/20051012-13\\_Manchester/05/1/BFUG7\\_8b\\_WG-QualificationsFramework\\_EQF\\_584051.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/20051012-13_Manchester/05/1/BFUG7_8b_WG-QualificationsFramework_EQF_584051.pdf)

important that the promotion of the EHEA should build on the overarching EHEA-framework".<sup>164</sup>

The Qualifications Framework episode shows that the European Commission kept being active in the field of higher education although it needed the Lisbon Strategy to secure its position again. In the Bologna Process it insisted on its low profile because in that particular setting the EU member states and their representatives remained sensitive to the role of the Commission. It must be noted, however, that the Commission became more outspoken over time in the meetings of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG). It is public knowledge that the Commission played an active role in guiding the Process, often in close cooperation with the consultative members and in contributing to the texts of the successive Communiqué's. This was probably also because it was thought that (too) little progress was made. In the course of time it became clear that countries tried to slow down the implementation of the now 10 Process objectives by showing not much ambition. For other countries this was reason to find out what the actual state of affairs was.

The Commission also continued to stress its own contribution to the modernisation process of higher education and its contribution to the Bologna Process. It outlined its contribution for the first time in the working document *From Prague to Berlin. The EU Contribution*, in November 2001, which was presented one month later to the Directors-General for Higher Education. The Commission showed that ten EU contributions were covering six out of the – at the time – nine Bologna action lines. It remarked – not without irony – that 'most action lines coincide with Commission policies, supported through the Socrates programme over the years'. The content of the document was updated in August 2002 and February 2003 on the basis of more detailed Progress Reports. In the 2002 version 'the link to the broader agenda defined by the Heads of State and Governments in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002)' was explicitly made.<sup>165</sup>

Comparable documents were prepared for the Bergen, the London and the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve summits. The 2007 edition contained a list of 22 pages of the most relevant projects co-financed by the European Union in relation to the Bologna Process. It also showed that the European Commission contributed significantly to the implementation to the reform priorities and related activities, such as the stocktaking exercise. In the paper, the Commission Commu-

<sup>164</sup> *Bergen to London 2007. Secretariat Report on the Bologna Work Programme 2005-2007*, London, 2007, 11. Retrieved from: [http://media.ehea.info/file/2007\\_London/09/3/2007\\_London\\_BFUG-Secretariat\\_Report\\_581093.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/2007_London/09/3/2007_London_BFUG-Secretariat_Report_581093.pdf)

<sup>165</sup> *From Prague to Berlin. The EU Contribution*, 27 November 2001: <http://www.um.es/inovacion/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/comunicadodebruselas2001.pdf>.

*From Prague to Berlin. The EU Contribution. Progress Report*, Brussels, 1 Augustus 2002: [http://www.aic.lv/bolona/Bologna/contrib/EU/EU\\_prgbe\\_prog.PDF](http://www.aic.lv/bolona/Bologna/contrib/EU/EU_prgbe_prog.PDF)

nication of 2006 – requested and later endorsed by the Council of Ministers – was highlighted in straight forward phrasing: ‘A major effort should be made to achieve the core Bologna reforms by 2010: comparable qualifications (short cycle, bachelor, master, doctorate); flexible, modernised curricula at all levels which correspond to the needs of the labour market; and trustworthy quality assurance systems’. It is pointed out explicitly that national authorities should take ‘targeted incentives (...) in order to ensure proper take-up of the reforms rather than mere superficial compliance with the standards. Curricula in specific disciplines or professions should be renovated, drawing on comparisons and best practice at European level’. And as a little nugget: ‘The Bologna process is more than half-way, the reforms are in the laws, now reforms have to become a reality for students and teachers in everyday university life’. A reference was made in this respect to common reference points for curricula – phrased as cycle level descriptors for (at the time) 27 subject areas – developed by the Tuning project.<sup>166</sup> The Commission felt it was in the position to make these strong remarks, doing its share by contributing significantly to the financing of the progress reporting, the ENQA and EQAR organisations as well as the Tuning project. It made this explicit again in the 2009 edition, printed for the first time in full colour and distributed widely as a formal Commission publication.<sup>167</sup>

For the Bologna Process as a coordinated effort for reforming higher education to develop one European Higher Education Area, both the development of the *Standards and Guidelines* and the *Qualifications Framework* were of essential importance, adding two new necessary instruments to two already existing ones, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement (DS). It filled the Bologna toolbox further. Eight months before the Bergen summit, a completely new edition of the ECTS Users’ Guide was published by the European Commission.<sup>168</sup> The guide, prepared by Tuning experts and European Commission officials, for the first time outlined ECTS in terms of both a transfer and an accumulation system. It also linked student workload to learning outcomes as a condition for awarding credit. The guide included a section about the DS as well. The format and its explanatory note of the DS had been developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES in 1998. It was presented as a mandatory annex to the diploma, offering a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of studies for which a qual-

<sup>166</sup> European Commission, *From Bergen to London. The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process*. Brussels, 7 May 2007. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: [http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2005\\_07/Position\\_pap\\_Consult\\_memb/FromBergentoLondonEC7May2007.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2005_07/Position_pap_Consult_memb/FromBergentoLondonEC7May2007.pdf)

<sup>167</sup> European Commission, *The EU contribution to the Bologna Process*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009. (ISBN 978-92-79-09731-7)

<sup>168</sup> ECTS Users’ Guide. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement. Brussels, 17 August 2004.

ification is awarded. All these instruments should offer transparency and should allow for comparability and compatibility through quality assurance and by giving more substance to the adopted Open Method of Coordination for bringing the Process forward.

By initiating uniformity and mutual compatibility, in terms of methods, procedures, schedules, specifications or system the Process moved into the realm of harmonization. How else to interpret the endorsement of a three cycle *system*, Qualifications Frameworks, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the acceptance of the Tuning revision of the European Credit Transfer System into the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation *System* (still abbreviated as ECTS) as the European credit model? It is no accident that in the (scholarly) discourse about the Bologna Process from 2005 the term policy harmonization would be used as a synonym for policy convergence.<sup>169</sup> Harmonization in the meaning of narrowing variance in structural factors, processes, qualifications frameworks, quality standards, degree cycles and credits.<sup>170</sup> Okeke states that harmonization is more or less synonymous with convergence by coordinating different systems through ‘eliminating major differences and creating minimum requirements and standards’.<sup>171</sup> As was explained in the previous chapter linguistically speaking and taking into account the concepts of consequential and procedural harmonization, there are obvious differences. At least that is how it was felt by policy makers until the middle of the first decade of the new century.

## Taking stock

In 1999 the initiators of the Bologna Process had given themselves 10 years to develop the European Higher Education Area. As agreed in 2003, in 2005 at the Bergen summit stock was taken of the actual progress made. The main conclusion reported by the working group responsible was a very positive one: ‘there is good news for the countries involved in the Bologna Process: the collective and

<sup>169</sup> E.g. Fejes, Andreas, Standardising Europe: The Bologna Process and new modes of governing, in: *Learning and Teaching*. Vol. 1, No. 2, June 2008, pp. 25-49 states unequivocally that the Bologna Process aims at ‘harmonising the higher education systems in Europe’. See also Eva Maria Vögtle, *Higher Education Policy Convergence and the Bologna Process. A Cross-National Study*. Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Compare in this respect Introduction and conclusion of the study.

<sup>170</sup> Ennet Tadesse Woldegiorgis, Conceptualizing Harmonization of Higher Education Systems: The Application of Regional Integration Theories on Higher Education Studies, in: *Higher Education Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 2, 2013, quote 14.

<sup>171</sup> C. Okoke, A Neglected Impediment to True Africanisation of African Higher Education Curricula: Same Agenda, Differential Fee Regimes, in: *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 8(2), 39-52.

voluntary inter-governmental process is a success'. The outcomes of the Stock-taking report seemed to underpin this general conclusion. It used the methodology of national self-reporting as the main source of information, basing it on a list of 23 open questions. Countries were asked to make use of factual information delivered by EURYDICE and the Council of Europe depending on the topic: quality assurance, two-cycle degree system and recognition. The working group developed a five level Bologna Scorecard (from green to red) to measure and to compare progress made by the countries involved. It also underpinned the levels with benchmarks formulated in terms of a total of 10 criteria or – probably better phrased – of indicators. The system developed seemed to make a thorough impression at first instance. Nevertheless, according to the scorecard summary only two, Denmark and Norway, out of the 40 countries deserved the final mark 'green' for each of the three items that were measured.<sup>172</sup>

A closer look to the criteria applied and its outcomes as well as by referencing the information with the progress reports of *Trends IV* and the 2005 version of *Bologna with student eyes*, show that the 40 countries gave their own interpretation of the progress made regarding the implementation of the three key objectives covered. This was also noted by the Bologna Follow-up Group itself. Its conclusion: the national scorecards should be read as 'progress charts', but not as absolute measures, which conformed the suspicions raised.<sup>173</sup> The students were most direct in their analyses: 'Bologna still is "Bologna à la carte" in many countries'. Regarding the reform of the degree structure they noted superficial reforms and re-packing of existing programmes; splitting long programmes in two without any re-designing. They also observed large differences between countries with respect to the other priorities, quality assurance and recognition. ESIB stressed that student involvement had not been improved since Prague 2001, that the issue of doctoral studies (included as objective number 10 in the Berlin Communiqué of 2003) had made no progress and that the social dimension was not perceived by almost all countries being part of the Bologna Process. Most remarkable in the student report, however, is the helicopter view taken, which is most of all political and very far from the grass-root level. In the reporting there is nowhere concrete attention given to the actual implementation of the process within the higher education institutions, that is the role of teaching and supporting staff as well as students, to change the curricula.

<sup>172</sup> Bologna Process Stocktaking. Report from a Working Group appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005, 40-41.

<sup>173</sup> "From Berlin to Bergen". General Report of the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education. Bergen, 19-20 May 2005, 39; European University Association, *TRENDS IV*; ESIB (The National Unions of Students in Europe), *Bologna with student eyes. Bologna Analysis*. Bergen, May 2005. Retrieved from: [http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace\\_disk/Bologna/Bergen\\_conf/Reports/050510\\_ESIB-Analysis.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace_disk/Bologna/Bergen_conf/Reports/050510_ESIB-Analysis.pdf)

This was different for the EUA *Trends IV* report. It showed a break in methodology applied in the earlier reports. The primary source of information was no longer questionnaires to government officials and Rector's Conferences as main stakeholders, but 62 well-prepared site-visits to higher education institutions in 29 countries. One could phrase it as a thermometer measuring the state of affairs of the real patient, the sector that was expected to deliver. The report presented, provided 'an in-depth and the most up-to-date snapshot of the state of implementation of the Bologna reforms in Europe's Universities'. It was optimistic in tone, stating that the reform process was irreversible by now. There seemed to be consensus – in particular among institutional leaders – that reform was 'embraced' although higher educational institutions had difficulties with its extent and form, lacking often institutional autonomy and funding. It was noted, however, that legal and structural changes had not yet seriously impacted the design of curricula. Although the issue of curricular reform is highlighted, implying modularization and applying the learning outcomes approach, no attention is given to the real implications for teaching and learning: what should be learned to prepare graduates better for their role in society?

What is important to note, is that the main parties involved in the Bologna Follow-up Group came to realize over time that coordinated structural reforms at national level might not be enough. The way higher education institutions composed and implemented their degree programmes could and probably should be another essential component for reform. In the Berlin Communiqué the Ministers encouraged for the very first time 'to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile'. Two years later in Bergen a reference was made to learning outcomes and competences in relation to the descriptors defined in the QF for the EHEA. The London 2007 Communiqué reported 'increasing awareness that a significant outcome of the process will be a move towards student-centred higher education and away from teacher driven provision'. The Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve 2009 Communiqué, finally, devoted a whole paragraph to the topic 'Student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education'.

The inclusion and formulation of the paragraph was not self-evident, because it did not appear in earlier drafts. Some guidance from Tuning experts in the writing process was required to overcome the blind spot of the Bologna Follow-up Group about the role of academics in the process. As a result, for the very first time, credit was given to education and the teaching staff itself, going beyond legislation and structures. In their endorsed document, the ministers defined student-centred learning as empowering individual learners, requiring 'new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner in all three cycles (...) 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'. By including this wording not only credit was given to the work done by Tuning and many Thematic Network Programmes, but it reflected also the understanding that reform required commitment and involvement of the whole academic and supporting staff not only of the leadership of higher education institutions. In relation to the above, higher education institutions were asked 'to pay particular attention to improving the teaching quality of their study programmes at all levels'.<sup>174</sup> It came six years after the observation in the Trends III report (2003) that Bologna objectives needed interpretation at departmental level, that is 'rethinking current teaching structures, units, methods, evaluation and the permeability between disciplines and institutions'.<sup>175</sup> By stressing 'how' learning should be organized and implemented, the Ministers and their civil servants entered the domain of the higher education institutions.

Already at the time, the Bergen summit was understood by many close to the Process as its fulcrum. The first five years was a phase of construction and development and refinement of the (transparency) toolbox, the next five years should become the period of implementation. In Bergen it was foreseen, however, that the original deadline of 2010 to establish the EHEA would not be met. More fundamental reforms take time to be implemented. In the period 2005 until 2010 – when the ten years' anniversary of Bologna was celebrated – a tremendous pile of papers and reports was produced: documenting progress of the Process, summarizing the outcomes of related seminars, steering direction through position papers, showing its contribution and the like. In particular the progress reports became substantial and detailed, thanks also to the services of the European Commission, such as EURIDYCE, EUROSTAT and eurostudent.eu.

Did this imply that the interest for the process and its relevance was indeed widened, raising awareness throughout society – a necessity according to the Trends IV report? If the proof should be in the number of translations of the Bologna Declaration and its Follow-up Communiqués in the languages of the member states, it is not. The Declaration itself was translated according to the official EHEA website in 12 languages from the English original. Regarding the Communiqués, including the London 2007 one, the number of translations varied from 10 to 12, to be reduced to 6 for the Leuven-Louvain Communiqué (2009) to only 2 (French and Lithuanian) for the Bucharest Communiqué of 2012. In

<sup>174</sup> Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009 – 'The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade'. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009: Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101040/ministerial-conference-leuven-louvain-neuve-2009.html>

<sup>175</sup> European University Association, *Trends III*, 7



this respect it is probably even more symbolic that the information on the website of the Council of Europe regarding the Bologna Process was not updated after the summit of 2009.

Nevertheless, because of the intensity of the Process in the understanding of many interested outsiders – in particular until 2010 – it looked like a very serious and successful effort. This image was fed by the Bologna Follow-up Group itself; in the very first place by its agenda and activities. In addition to the Board and the Follow-up Group working groups were set-up to prepare activities. These were filled with administrators active in the Bologna Follow-up Group or their close colleagues. This was in particular the case after the Bergen summit. The impressive BFUG work programme 2005-2007 comprised of working groups on stocktaking, the external dimension, the social dimension and data on staff and student mobility, qualifications frameworks, portable grants and loans and at a later stage for preparing the London Communiqué. Furthermore, eight official Bologna seminars were organised about cultural heritage and values of the EHEA, the attractiveness of the EHEA, employability, joint degrees and Bologna in a global setting, recognition, staff and student mobility and doctoral programmes and two projects were set-up; a first one on the practicalities of implementing a European register of quality assurance agencies and a second one on doctoral programmes.

The BFUG work programme 2007-2009 was not less ambitious, giving input to the priorities agreed in London: Mobility, Social Dimension, Data collection, Employability, the EHEA in a global context and stocktaking again. For this purpose a total of 9 Working, Coordination or Steering Groups were established, covering as many topics. The *From London to Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve. Report on the Work Programme of the Bologna Follow-up Group (2007-2009)* reported more than 20 Bologna related seminars and conferences.

However, for the Coordination group it was very clear where the focus should be in the next two to four years to come when the balance was made up in 2009: developing describing and implementing learning outcomes. This would require ‘a good mix of targeted activities’ at international, national and institutional level and the involvement of all EHEA countries. Crucial it was thought was the link between describing and implementing learning outcomes. In the wording of the work programme: ‘It is important both to provide adequate descriptions of learning outcomes and to ensure that these be followed by implementation and not be reduced to formalistic administrative exercises without a real impact on the teaching and learning’.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *From London to Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve. Report on the Work Programme of the Bologna Follow-up Group (2007-2009)*: [http://www.ehea.info/uploads/related%20eu%20activities/report%202007\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/uploads/related%20eu%20activities/report%202007_2009.pdf)

Again from the outside it looks like an unstoppable machinery. This raises the question what the machine produced, besides a lot of data, bites and paper, in terms of real results which were meeting the ten objectives. A good indicator over time is the issue of preparing (better) for employment. As was shown earlier, this was seen – by both policy leaders and higher education leaders – as one of the main drivers for reform. At the same time it was a source of criticism for it was making the Process largely an economically motivated endeavour. The message as included in Trends V (2007) is significant in this respect. Stressing that employability is perceived as a high priority in the reform of all cycles, the results so far show there is still much to be done to transform it into practice. It speaks of ‘a paradox for a reform process inspired, at least part, by a concern that higher education should be more responsive to the needs of a changing society and labour market’. This meant a change of culture for many higher education institutions, because it required strengthening a dialogue with employers and other external stakeholders. The word ‘strengthening’ probably is an understatement, because in many cases the relation was still non-existent or limited to research cooperation. In the framework of the Trends reporting, this element has been surveyed since 2003. Trends 2010 informed about the results of a longitudinal study, showing “a decline in the number of respondents who indicated close collaboration with employers: 24%, down from about 30% in *Trends III* and *V*.” The Trends 2015 also gives an outcome of 24%. However, it also noticed that the percentage of institutions that *occasionally* involved professional associations and employers was raised from 39% in 2010 to 54% in 2015. The peak between 2003 and 2007 is explained by the fact that this was the most active period in terms of Bologna curriculum reform. This information is consistent with the outcomes of a study implemented by the International Tuning Academy.<sup>177</sup> The conclusion also drawn by the author of Trends 2015 is that policy discussions at European and national levels calling for further enhancement, have had no significant impact.

Trends 2015 offered as an explanation the argument – regularly used – that in the vast majority of cases there is not a one-to-one relationship between a specific programme and a specific job. It is underpinned with the outcomes of a recent French study.<sup>178</sup> The argument is not very convincing, because every degree programme also prepares for a particular type of activities in the labour

<sup>177</sup> Tim Birtwistle and Robert Wagenaar, *A Long Way To Go ...A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU and the USA*. Groningen, 2016.

<sup>178</sup> A 2013 study of the third largest French region revealed that only 17% of jobs were closely related to a specific study programme and 24% were not related at all; in the middle are 59% of jobs that are loosely related to a specific study programmes. Gay-Fragenaud, P., 2013, *Métiers- formations : quelles relations en Provence-Alpes –Côte d’Azur ? En quelques chiffres n°11* (Marseille, Observatoire régional emploi-formation de la région PACA), 16-18. Retrieved from: [http://www.orm-paca.org/IMG/pdf/orm\\_eqc11\\_web.pdf](http://www.orm-paca.org/IMG/pdf/orm_eqc11_web.pdf)

market, which covers a broad range of jobs. This leads from the question *how* learning is taking place, to *what* is actually learned in terms of relevance for operating successfully in the world of work after graduation. It is in the Bucharest Communiqué (2012) that an explicit reference is made to the required skills and competences set: ‘Today’s graduates need to combine transversal, multidisciplinary and innovation skills and competences with up-to-date subject specific knowledge so as to be able to contribute to the wider needs of society and the labour market’. It is the topic covered by the Tuning initiative since 2001 and for which the European Commission has asked attention before and as part of the Lisbon Strategy, in both policy statements and concrete actions.

As has been stipulated, the Lisbon Strategy was given a follow-up by the European Commission with the Communication *The role of universities in the Europe of Knowledge* in 2003, which should be read in conjunction with the Communication *Investing efficiently in education and training*, also published in 2003.<sup>179</sup> Follow-up Communications were *Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy* (2005) and (mentioned already above) *Delivering on the modernization agenda for universities: Education research and innovation* (2006).<sup>180</sup> Both should be understood against the disappointing results of the Lisbon Strategy as reported by the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok in 2004: *Facing the Challenge. The Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment*.<sup>181</sup> It shows that the Commission, through its Communications, intended to get a grip on the discourse again, which had been initiated in the 1990s and partly lost as a result of the Sorbonne and Bologna initiatives as we have seen in the previous chapter. This was done by linking the Lisbon and Bologna sets of objectives.

The 2005 and 2006 Communications triggered (immediate) responses from academics working in the field of European studies/ international relation studies and higher education (policy) studies. Two publications stand out in this respect,

<sup>179</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Communication, *The role of universities in the Europe of Knowledge*. COM(2003)58final. Brussels, 05.03.2003; Commission of the European Communities, Communication *Investing efficiently in education and training*. COM(2002)779final. Brussels, 10.01.2003; See also: Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission, “*Education & Training 2010*”. *The success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms*. COM (2003)685final. Brussels, 11.11.2003.

<sup>180</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission, *Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy*. COM(2005)152final. Brussels, 20.4.2005; Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, *Delivering on the modernization agenda for universities: Education research and innovation* COM(2006)208 final. Brussels, 10.5.2006.

<sup>181</sup> European Communities, *Facing the challenge. The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment. Report from the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, November 2004.

because they reflect the wide range of opinions well: the volume *University Dynamics and European Integration* edited by Peter Maassen and Johan P. Olsen (2007) and the paper *The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: the European Commission's expanding role in higher education discourse* (2006) by Ruth Keeling. Keeling stresses the Commission's contribution to the debate noting that the Commission did not foster well-articulated and consistent ideas (yet). In her wording: "The Commission is in many ways dominating the discourse, but it has also played a significant part in opening up the discussion of the challenges facing higher education on the European level. Its introduction of 'Europe' to higher education has added a dynamic new layer to an on-going debate — which involves an extensive range of players, as it has always done."<sup>182</sup>

Olsen and Maassen question the reform rhetoric applied by in particular the European Commission urging universities to adapt better 'economic and technological change, and economy and efficiency'. This requires better integration of universities into society, in particular into industry and the business community. They raise the question what kind of university should be preferred? Clearly not a university driven by economic motives and governed accordingly. They state that the Commission 'has claimed that a dynamic knowledge-based economy (and society) requires modernisation of the European University', which should in the wording of the authors – in short – emphasize 'leadership, management and entrepreneurship more than individual academic freedom, internal democracy and the organizing role of academic disciplines'. In their opinion a 'knowledge economy' should go hand in hand with a 'knowledge society' by taking the 'social' and cultural role of the (European) university seriously.<sup>183</sup> As has been mentioned, this opinion was expressed earlier by the EUA.<sup>184</sup> Their argument follows studies on the 'creeping competences' strategy applied by the Commission to enhance its position and role as a contribution to developing the Common Market. The concept had been introduced by Pollack in 1994 and articulated by other scholars since.<sup>185</sup> On the basis of their observations, underpinned by the research on the policies of the European Commission, Olsen and Maassen draw the conclusion that the Bologna Process of ministers of education should be

<sup>182</sup> Ruth Keeling, *The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: the European Commission's expanding role in higher education discourse*, in: *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006, pp. 203-223, quote: 216.

<sup>183</sup> Johan P. Olsen and Peter Maassen, *European Debates on the Knowledge Institution: The Modernization of the University at the European Level*, in: Peter Maassen and Johan P. Olsen, eds., *University Dynamics and European Integration*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007, pp. 3-22, quotes: 4, 6 and 7.

<sup>184</sup> European University Association (EUA), *Response to the Communication from the Commission. The role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge*. Brussels, May 2003.

<sup>185</sup> Mark A. Pollack, *Creeping Competence: The Expanding Agenda of the European Community*, in: *Journal Public Policy*. Vol. 14. No. 2, April 1994, pp. 95-145.

preferred to a leading role of the European Commission. The scholarly discourse on the governance issue, the responsibilities of stakeholders in the process and the role of universities in this context would continue over time.<sup>186</sup>

Independent of which party should take the lead in the reform process, the discourse met the argument of the Tuning initiators that the role of the Commission, but also that of the national authorities should be limited to harmonizing systems and that the discourse on the reform of programmes should be left to the academics (in consultation with their stakeholders), although there should be alignment to the different levels of decision making and implementation. See in this respect the model developed and applied by Tuning and presented in chapter 6.

Not without irony it can be stated that from 2004 the Commission – notwithstanding its Communications which seem to have had limited effect anyway – would undermine its own position and therefore impact in the university world and particularly in the field of education(al) (programmes) reform. It went along with the wish of the Bologna Follow-up Group to hand over the responsibility for the international ‘ECTS experts’ to the national authorities, after these had been renamed ‘Bologna experts’. When the SOCRATES II programme (2000-2006) was replaced by the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013), it also terminated the financing of the Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs). These networks of subject areas had proven to be an important instrument to facilitate the discourse among academics to reform their study programmes. The Commission set their agenda partly because of the topics included in the Calls for financial support which it expected to be covered by these networks.

While giving up these important tools for reflection on the content of learning at European level, the Commission continued its activities for promoting reform by stressing the importance of competences. In December 2006 the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers published a *Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*, identifying 8 basic competences. The Recommendation stated that ‘key competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment’. It was also stressed that these were ‘essential in a knowledge society and guarantee more flexibility in the labour force, allowing it to adapt more quickly to constant changes in an increasingly interconnected world’. They are seen as ‘a major factor in innovation, productivity and competitiveness’, and a contribution ‘to the motivation and satisfaction of workers and the quality of work’.<sup>187</sup> As a follow-up, two years later, the

<sup>186</sup> See the publications mentioned in footnote 9.

<sup>187</sup> Brochure: European Commission, *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – European Reference Framework*, Brussels, 2007.

See for the quote: Key competences for lifelong learning: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-con-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-con)

Commission launched its initiative 'New Skills for New Jobs' in particular meant for higher education, followed by a report in 2010 of an European Commission Expert Group: *New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now*.<sup>188</sup> It was in 2011 followed-up by the European Commission Communication *Supporting growth and jobs – An agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems*. These communications have been summarized and analyzed well by C. Sin et al in 2016.<sup>189</sup>

From the above it can be learned that it took the Bologna Process a long time to see what was really required to make a difference; besides convergence/ harmonisation of systems, the paradigm change to student-centred learning, mentioned in the London Communiqué and articulated in the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) one. This would require strong alignment with the academic world which should have the prime responsibility for making the reforms – which were thought necessary – a reality. Gradually over time the academic world became convinced that in addition to knowledge accumulation, acquisition and transfer in their degree programmes more attention should be given to developing skill and competences. It acknowledged the necessity for handling, interpreting, analysing and applying/using a fast growing body of knowledge. In addition to the development of generic competences, this was felt conditional for reducing graduates employment by preparing them better for the work place, but also for civic, social and cultural engagement in society as was advocated by the Tuning project.

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tent/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URISERV:c11090&from=EN; The Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework is an annex of European Commission, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32006H0962&from=EN>; See also:

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions, Key competences for a changing world (Brussels, 25-11-2009): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0640:FIN:EN:PDF>; and *New Skills for New Jobs. Policy initiatives in the field of education: Short overview of the current situation in Europe* (November 2010): [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/125en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/125en.pdf); Relevant in this context is also: Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'): [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01)&from=EN)

<sup>188</sup> European Commission, *New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now. A report by the Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs prepared for the European Commission* (February 2010). The report resulted from a collective initiative of DG Employment and DG EAC.

<sup>189</sup> European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *Supporting growth and jobs – An agenda for the modernization of Europe's higher education systems*. COM (2011) 567 final. Brussels, 20.09.2011; Cristina Sin, Amélia Veiga and Albetto Amaral, *European Policy Implementation and Higher Education. Analysing the Bologna Process*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 50-56.

## Critics

In retrospect the fears expressed by the critics of the Bologna Process that higher education would be handed over to economic interests, did not become a reality. This was mainly for two reasons: firstly because there proved to be consensus between European policy makers and higher education leaders that higher education should be nursed as a public good resulting in holding off talks in the setting of the World Trade organisations – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Secondly, because higher education institutions proved to have great difficulties in making their degree programmes more relevant for society, mainly due to a lack of means. To avoid misunderstandings, making education more relevant for society is not equal to handing over education to economic forces.

Among the most prominent and active critics of the Bologna Process has been the Dutch professor Chris Lorenz, who labelled Bologna a neo-liberal reform, an attempt to the economization of higher education. He wrote several articles about the topic from 2006 to 2011. The article that has drawn most attention is *Will the Universities survive in the European Integration?*<sup>190</sup> Dutch higher education policies were presented as a warning of what might come of the Bologna Process. In the article the author opposes the phrasing of the Bologna Declaration, which he labels as hollow, and he opposes the focus on the concepts of ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘knowledge society’ and the return rate approach. Although the article has the character of an accusation rather than a scholarly contribution he did have a point. Only in follow-up documents the Communiqué’s, attention was given to the concepts of civic society and citizenship. His follow-up article *Riddles of Neo-liberal University Reform. The Students Protests of 2009 as Bologna’s ‘Stress Test’*<sup>191</sup> is most of all a manifestation of ‘being in the right’. The problem with this article is – as with the protesting students in Austria, Germany and (not mentioned by him) Spain-, the mixing up of European and national policies. The author also did not inform himself very well about the actual development of the process and the progress reports before writing his paper.

<sup>190</sup> Chris Lorenz, Will the universities survive the European Integration? Higher Education Policies in the EU and in the Netherlands before and after the Bologna Declaration, in: *Sociologia Internationalis*, 44 (2006), 1, 123-153. Mid-2018 the article had 65 citations, which is an indicator it had some impact; See also: Chris Lorenz, “Higher Education Policies in the European Union, the ‘Knowledge Economy’ and Neo-Liberalism.”, *EspacesTemps.net*, Travaux, 12.07.2010: <https://www.espacestemp.net/articles/higher-education-policies-in-the-european-union/>

<sup>191</sup> Published in: C. F. G. Lorenz, , Krijnen, C., & Umlauf, J., eds., *Wahrheit oder Gewinn? Über die Ökonomisierung von Universität und Wissenschaft*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann Verlag, 2011, pp. 53-68.

In the arguments against, ‘Bologna’, European policies were blamed for the unwanted reforms, when in reality these were the outcomes of national policies or circumstances. In particular German and Austrian academics and university leaders proved to be advocates of this argument.<sup>192</sup> As Hans Pechar demonstrated convincingly in his paper ‘The Decline of an Academic Oligarchy. The Bologna Process and ‘Humboldt’s Last Warriors’<sup>193</sup> students” – although convinced of the validity of their arguments – had been whipped up by their professors, in particular coming from the Humanities and Social Sciences. Symbolic became the slogan: “In former times I was a poet and a philosopher; now I am a bachelor” expressing the self-appraisal of Germany being the country of poets and philosophers. It showed a ‘clash of values’, which according to Pechar was a misuse of the Humboldtian tradition to oppose the modernisation of higher education, that is protecting the status of the professor. Three main arguments were applied against Bologna of which the ones ‘workload has been increased’ and ‘mobility has decreased’ could not be underpinned by any evidence. The third argument that was made, ‘instead of improving the employability of students, it has created a degree the labour market does not accept’, proved to be correct for students not prepared well during their studies at a research university for the world of work, and missing the adequate skills set. Companies but also the civil services continued to prefer hiring a graduate with a master degree or a bachelor degree obtained from a University of Applied Sciences.

In Spain the protests were most of all a reflection of the fear of academics to lose their jobs, by using the argument that graduates would not be prepared sufficiently well for employment as a result of the new system; an argument picked up by the students. It explains why Spain introduced as one of the last Bologna countries the two-cycle model basing it on 4+1, instead of a 3+2 years’ system, to secure that students would stay in university for at least four years. In other countries protests against ‘Bologna’ did not take place on a comparable scale as in Germany, Austria and Spain.

<sup>192</sup> Helmut de Rudder, Mission accomplished? Which mission? The ‘Bologna process’ – a view from Germany. In: *Higher Education Review*, Vol. 43, No.1, 2010, 3-20; Christian Scholz and Volker Stein, hrsg., *Bologna-Schwarzbuch*. Deutscher Hochschulverband, 1 Mai 2009; A more recent journalistic overview: German Universities ‘Share Blame’ for Problems. In: Spiegel online, 15 August 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/press-review-on-bologna-process-education-reforms-a-850185.html>; See also the invited plenary lecture at the symposium “Socio-economic perspectives in the Life Sciences, held at the Universität für Bodenkultur Wien, Jože Mencinger, Can university survive the Bologna Process? 16 February 2004.

<sup>193</sup> Hans Pechar, ‘The Decline of an Academic Oligarchy. The Bologna Process and ‘Humboldt’s Last Warriors’ students”, in: Adrian Curaj, Peter Scott, Lazăr Vlasceanu, Lesley Wilson, eds., *European Higher Education at the Crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms*. Part 2. Dordrecht, etc.: Springer, 2012, pp. 613-630.



## Mobility

What about the realization of the other objectives, besides that of changing the system? In the first place the acceleration of student mobility for all three cycles, as well as that of teaching staff. Although this was the field in which the European Union had the highest credibility organizing and financing the ERASMUS, TEMPUS and from 2004 the ERASMUS Mundus schemes, in the Bologna Process it was perceived as one of the key objectives from the very start. In the period between 2009 and 2012 it was picked up as a central theme, which resulted in an official paper *Mobility for Better Learning. Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)* which was made an addendum of 5 pages to the Bucharest Communiqué.<sup>194</sup> The document belongs to the most remarkable of official Bologna documents mainly for four reasons. Not because of its core message, that was to urge countries to make – at long last – serious work of taking away remaining obstacles and stimulating mobility on the basis of a comprehensive list of 10 measures, but because of the (1) inclusion of explicit aims and targets, (2) expressed freedom for countries to develop and implement their own policies based on self-defined realistic targets, (3) the explicit inclusion of the European Commission as a major player and (4) a clear call to higher education institutions.

This implied in practice that the mobility target of 20% as endorsed in the Leuven-Louvain-la Neuve Communiqué was abandoned. Furthermore, it was decided to reduce the minimum requirement for credit mobility – a period at a foreign higher education institution – to 15 ECTS credits (half a semester). Setting own targets at national level meant that a general European policy was replaced by a model of coordinated action of 47 individual states. By lowering standards, it should become easier to meet these. Furthermore, the indispensable role of the European Commission was finally formally acknowledged. After 13 years of belittling its role this was a turnaround, because in the document now 47 signatories expressed requests, demands, calls, invitations to an organization of which 20 members were not part. To give just some examples of a longer list: the European Union was ‘requested’ to secure adequate mobility funding in numbers and amounts through its education programmes and was ‘invited’ to develop and provide data about mobility.

Why did the Bologna Group make this clear gesture towards the European Commission? First of all its institutions proved to be best in place to ‘measure progress’. Probably more important, however, was that a new generation of civil

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<sup>194</sup> EHEA Ministerial Conference, Bucharest 2012. Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Retrieved from:

[https://media.ehea.info/file/2012\\_Bucharest/39/2/2012\\_EHEA\\_Mobility\\_Strategy\\_606392.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/39/2/2012_EHEA_Mobility_Strategy_606392.pdf)

servants had over time replaced the original group of administrators in the Bologna Follow-up Group, and it did not have the same sensitivity regarding the European Commission. Another reason might be that the European Commission team of core players, David Coyne and Peter van der Hijden, was succeeded by a new team consisting of Jordi Currell Gotor, as director for higher education and International Affairs, and Adam Tyson, appointed as head of the policy unit for higher education, who both did not have a history in European Commission higher education policy making.<sup>195</sup>

Higher education institutions were not only called upon in the BFUG Mobility paper to adopt and implement their own internationalization strategy, which a vast number had already done given the conditions to obtain EU funding, but also to offer incentives for staff mobility, create mobility-friendly structures and framework conditions and develop “international experience at home” initiatives. Interesting in this respect is that at the same time ‘more than half of the countries lack(ed) a national internationalization strategy or guidance to the various stakeholders involved in the internationalization process’<sup>196</sup>.

This did not mean that the BFUG intended to limit its own role – on the contrary. It asked the ministers the mandate ‘to conduct a needs analysis amongst students and higher education institutions, to take stock of and to map existing admission systems, to collect examples of good practice and to explore the potential of using common standards for the description of study programmes, ways to facilitate access to relevant information while avoiding additional burden on institutions, making best use of information already available, how universities involved in organising ERASMUS Mundus Masters classes or their successors could cooperate in setting up a joint internet-based admission system, ways to assist interested member countries in developing their national internet based admission systems by benchmarking good practices and the possibility of regional cooperation as a means to developing common or compatible internet based admission systems, the possibility of enhancing cooperation in verifying the documentation of foreign qualifications in order to support institutions during the admission process’.<sup>197</sup> Besides the concern whether this would be feasible for an informal body lacking financial

<sup>195</sup> David Coyne’s direct successor was David White, but he only was in office for a short period. The predecessor of Tyson was Barbara Nolan, the direct supervisor of Peter van der Hijden. Nolan, Tyson and Currell were all previously employed at DG Employment.

<sup>196</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, 264.

<sup>197</sup> Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Retrieved from: [https://media.ehea.info/file/2012\\_Bucharest/39/2/2012\\_EHEA\\_Mobility\\_Strategy\\_606392.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/39/2/2012_EHEA_Mobility_Strategy_606392.pdf)

resources, one might also raise the question whether policy making should become so detailed in the direction of the higher education institutions without offering much in return.

Whatever one might think of this initiative, more relevant is whether it gave an extra stimulus to the topic. In 2015 *Bologna with student eyes* concluded that little progress had been made, and that the largest obstacles had remained since 2012. It also stressed in its report insufficient commitment from countries both in the past and in the present.<sup>198</sup> This opinion is to a large extent confirmed by the Bologna Process Implementation Reports 2012 and 2015, which were prepared by the European Commission. They offer an overall picture which is not too rosy. One of the targets of the Bologna Process was to become a more attractive area for non-EHEA students. During the period 2008-9 to 2011-12 the percentage of enrolled incoming degree students from outside the EHEA grew from 2.25 to 2.27%. The overall rate (EHEA/non-EHEA) grew during the same period from 4.0 to 4.4%. On the other hand, only 0.35/0.36% of EHEA students enrolled at a non-EHEA institution during these years. Credit mobility did not increase substantially during the first decade of the Process. More recent data are not available.<sup>199</sup>

## Disappointing results

In the years 2008-2009 the Bologna Independent Assessment was implemented, resulting in the report *The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area*. The study states that higher education in the EHEA countries looks substantially different because the architectural elements, that is legislation and regulation, have been implemented in most countries. However, it concludes at the same time that the impact on the level of higher education institutions and study programmes is still 'wanting'. Moreover, compatibility and comparability have not been achieved yet and the implementation of key objectives varies widely between countries. As a result, an EHEA has been created at different speeds of implementation and with varying levels of commitment, resulting in divergence instead of convergence. It is noted that countries had different challenges and interpreted the agenda differently. In particular, new countries in the Process proved to be lagging behind. Major challenges remained for all objectives: mobility, the three-cycle system, which, although adopted in all countries had its

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<sup>198</sup> European Students' Union, *Bologna with student eyes*. Main Findings. Retrieved from: <http://bwse2015.esu-online.org/Main+findings>

<sup>199</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, 229-231.

variations as noted above, the use of ECTS, broadened from a transfer to an accumulation system, to be based on workload and student learning outcomes, quality assurance mechanisms, the implementation of qualifications frameworks and recognition policies. Finally, the social dimension – being a complex and broad topic – had not been seriously addressed in the vast majority of countries. The message for the future is unambiguous. The attention should no longer be focused on further refinement of the architecture, but on greater involvement of staff within higher education institutions and other non-state actors being perceived as a key factor for success, according to the authors of the Bologna Independent Assessment report.<sup>200</sup>

In the years following not much progress was made, although the Bucharest Communiqué of 2012 might give a different impression. Its tone is rather optimistic as is the introduction of the EU Commissioner in the related Bologna Process Implementation Report, stating that the Process has achieved remarkable results over its first decade referring to the foundations of the EHEA: ‘The Bologna Process is a European success story of which we should be proud’. In the wording of the Bucharest Communiqué: ‘The Bologna reforms have changed the face of higher education across Europe, thanks to the involvement and dedication of higher education institutions, staff and students. Higher education structures in Europe are now more compatible and comparable. Quality assurance systems contribute to building trust, higher education qualifications are more recognizable across borders and participation in higher education has widened. Students today benefit from a wider variety of educational opportunities and are increasingly mobile. The vision of an integrated EHEA is within reach’.<sup>201</sup>

It reflects wishful thinking, and shows a disconnect to the actual situation. Being nevertheless aware that further action is required, it states that for the period up to the next Communiqué ‘we will especially concentrate on fully supporting our higher education institutions and stakeholders in their efforts to deliver meaningful changes and to further the comprehensive implementation of all Bologna action lines’. In the perception of the Ministers this is a way to promote the learning outcomes approach. The solution identified is in the revision of the ECTS Users’ Guide: ‘We will work to ensure that the ECTS Users’ Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recog-

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<sup>200</sup> Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission), *The Bologna Process Independent Assessment, The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area. Volume 1 Detailed assessment report*. Prepared by CHEPS; University of Bath; INCHER-Kassel; ECOTEC; IHF; Nuffic. Brussels, January 2010.

Executive Summary, 5-9 and Overall Conclusions, 107-110.

<sup>201</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat/Eurostudent, *The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Brussels: Eurydice, 2012.

inition of prior learning'.<sup>202</sup> This is an interesting strategy of taking responsibility for a product 'owned' by the European Commission, which is not a result of the Bologna Process. But furthermore, by giving substance to the intention to extend ECTS from a credit system into a comprehensive methodology to reform degree programmes. In this context the Ministers also express their intention that at the national level, in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders – in particular higher education institutions – conditions should be established 'that foster student-centred learning, innovative teaching methods and a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment, while continuing to involve students and staff in governance structures at all levels'. A revised ECTS Users' Guide indeed was published in 2015 by the European Commission, which was produced by the international group of experts involved in the development of ECTS in the past.<sup>203</sup> No initiative was taken towards the implementation of student-centred learning. In other words, the Bologna Follow-up group proved itself again to be a lame duck.

In this case it was again the European Commission that undertook action by setting up a High Level Group, which was chaired by the former president of Ireland, to come up with a *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions*, which was published in June 2013. This was one more policy document to steer action, in this case based on 16 recommendations, of which two were directed to the national authorities, 3 to the EU and 11 to HE institutions, which thus got the main burden. None of the recommendations surprises or offers new insights. Maybe the most interesting ones are the urge towards the EU to establish a European Academy for Teaching and Learning led by stakeholders (Recommendation 14) and the expressed wish that in 2020 all teaching staff in higher education should have received certified pedagogical training and continuous professional education as teachers should have become obligatory (Recommendation 4).<sup>204</sup> As a result of the first point the European University Association was 'persuaded' by the European Commission to implement a feasibility study in the framework of a new European Commission Call 'Forward Looking Cooperation Programmes', being part of the Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020) the successor of the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013). The EUA dubbed it 'European Forum for

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<sup>202</sup> Bucharest Communiqué 2012 – Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area. Bucharest, 2012. Retrieved from: [https://media.ehea.info/file/2012\\_Bucharest/67/3/Bucharest\\_Communique\\_2012\\_610673.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/67/3/Bucharest_Communique_2012_610673.pdf)

<sup>203</sup> European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide 2015*. Luxembourg: Publications of the European Union, 2015.

<sup>204</sup> European Commission, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions*. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union, June 2013, 79 pp.

Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching' (EFFECT).<sup>205</sup> 'Persuaded' is an adequate expression in this context because it meant entering a new territory for the organization, which it had avoided for more than 15 years and would prefer to leave to others also in the years to come.<sup>206</sup>

The above topic relates to an initiative taken by the International Tuning Academy and the Lumina Foundation in the USA initiated in 2011 to set-up a study regarding the actual implementation of the student-centred approach at higher education level. It was the first serious study in this respect, applying an approach close to the one used for the preparation of the Trends IV report of 2005 but much more in-depth and tailored to its topic. The purpose of the study was to find out whether the intended modernisation of learning was actually taking place and how this process was perceived by its main stakeholders, both in the EU and the USA. It was based on a two-pillar approach, applying quantitative and qualitative instruments. The outcomes of the study confirm that in general limited progress had been made regarding the intended paradigm shift and that key expectations of the reform process had not been met, both in the case for Europe and the USA. Although good practices were identified, the actual implementation of the student-centred approach had not yet proceeded in the vast majority of Bologna countries and institutions beyond a discourse on the paradigm shift. The study concluded that there was no certainty this would be achieved in the near future.<sup>207</sup>

The study shows an even more disturbing picture than the 2015 Bologna analyses of progress, as reported in the European Commission Implementation Report 2015: "lack of recognition of the value of student evaluation, independent learning and the use of learning outcomes"; the Trends 2015 report: "not all these positive developments are common everywhere and, therefore, more progress is needed"; and last but not least the *Bologna with student eyes* 2015 report: "there has clearly been some progress ..... 50% of respondents think that progress is slow.....the other half....are still not convinced that student-centred learning has been made a priority in higher education....".<sup>208</sup>

<sup>205</sup> European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching' (EFFECT) on EUA website: <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/current-projects/higher-education-policy/effect>

<sup>206</sup> According to the secretary-general of the EUA, stated in a talk with the author of this study in January 2015.

<sup>207</sup> Tim Birtwistle, Courtney Brown and Robert Wagenaar, A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Volume 3, Issue No. 2, May 2016, pp. 429-463.

<sup>208</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Brussels, 2015, 18; European University Association, *Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities*. Prepared by Andrée Surssock. Brussels, 2015, 94; European Students' Union, *Bologna with student eyes 2015 report*, chapter 'Student Centred Learning'. Retrieved from: <http://bwse2015.esu-online.org/Student-Centred+Learning>.

For Europe a worrying disconnect was observed between the various tiers of the higher education sector, ranging from Ministers to students, regarding the actual penetration of the student-centred approach and the education experience of the students. Analyses of course catalogues and course manuals of the universities by the research team, showed a serious confusion in the use of correct and fitting terminology. The Tuning study confirmed also the failure to engage with and convince academic staff about the necessity and advantages of the paradigm shift from expert-driven to student-centred education. Teaching staff stipulated over and over again that it was seriously struggling to adjust to the new concepts and paradigm shift and challenged by no longer being the “knowledge owners” but rather learning facilitators. The majority of teaching staff had not had serious professional training for higher education teaching and was therefore not up-to-date with modern techniques and approaches regarding learning, teaching and assessment. With a few exceptions higher education institutions did not have the necessary infrastructure in place for staff training and development, including the lack of informed trainers and tutors. Serious investment had not been made so far, also due to a lack of funding.<sup>209</sup> In chapter 8, *A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning outcomes based approach in the EU*, more detail is offered about the study.

In 2015 the situation was summarized in much more realistic terms by the EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Tibor Navracsics, than by his predecessor three years earlier: ‘Although countries are moving in the same direction, they do so at widely varying pace. As a result, the foundations of the European Higher Education Area are not yet fully stable. In many countries, students and graduates still face obstacles in having their studies abroad recognised for work or further study. Graduates too often discover that they do not have the skills and competences they need for their future careers. Higher education is still not easily accessible for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Student-centred learning, based on carefully planned goals, remains underdeveloped. And the potential of digital technologies to transform learning and teaching has not yet been grasped everywhere.’<sup>210</sup>

In the run towards the Bologna Follow-up summit of 2015 to take place in Yerevan serious concern developed that ministers would send high ranked civil servants instead of attending themselves. That would indicate that the Bologna Process was no longer perceived as of high political value. In the first months of 2014 the Benelux Countries, Germany, the European Commission and the consultative members EUA, ESU and the Council of Europe prepared the non-paper

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<sup>209</sup> Tim Birtwistle, Courtney Brown and Robert Wagenaar, *A Long Way To Go ...*, pp. 429-463.

<sup>210</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Brussels, 2015, 3 (Foreword).

*The Bologna Process revisited* in which indeed the question was raised whether the Bologna Process was still politically relevant. The paper was meant as an internal discussion paper for the Follow-up Group (consultative) members and as an invitation ‘to examine the nature and the limits of the policy instruments deployed in the Process’.<sup>211</sup>

The paper stressed that the Process had been perceived as a successful instance of pan-European cooperation based on a methodology comparable to the EU Open Method of Cooperation. It also stated that the Process had created an ‘agora’, a meeting place, for stakeholders, engaging them in an intensive dialogue, noting at the same time that in practice this dialogue had been limited to a ‘community of officials and experts and far less genuine practitioners’. It furthermore noticed that the most recent Bologna Implementation Report showed very uneven implementation between and within countries, with regard to all objectives, including the key ones. Decreased participation of ministers in the summits is noted and ‘weak participation and even weaker commitments to reform of some countries’. Underpinning the argument with the notion that not much progress had been made, by repeatedly using the same key terms in the succeeding Communiqué’s such as ‘employability’, ‘social dimension’, ‘lifelong learning’, ‘quality higher education for all’ showing the outcomes remained limited ‘to the setting of high-level, aspirational goals with little operational follow-up. It showed, according to the authors, lack of focus and had led to a “pick and choose” implementation.

The paper is a typical ‘Bologna’ one again, not aligning to the initiatives of the European Commission and the Lisbon Strategy. The focus is on a future role (or no role) of the in-crowd of the Follow-up Group. However, it must be acknowledged that the paper is also the first serious attempt of self-reflection. The opinions outlined in it were discussed at an extraordinary meeting and gave way to a more comprehensive paper carrying the same title, mainly prepared by the Italian Presidency.<sup>212</sup> It did not reach the status of official input for the summit as had been the case with the ‘Mobility for better learning’ document at the Bucharest Ministers meeting<sup>213</sup>, but was in the end used for the Communiqué, after two earlier drafts were turned down. The final version, endorsed in December 2014, focuses on the vision to establish a EHEA, putting emphasis on the cooperation aspects between countries, the mobility and recognition issues and

<sup>211</sup> The Bologna Process revisited. Doc. Code: BFUG\_GR\_KZ\_39\_5a Version 1: 28.03.2014

<sup>212</sup> The Bologna Process Revisited: The future of the European Higher Education Area. Doc. Code: BFUG\_LV\_IS\_43\_4. Last modified 10.12.2014.

<sup>213</sup> EHEA (European Higher Education Area) Ministerial Conference Bucharest 2012, Mobility for Better Learning. Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Retrieved on 1 December 2018 from: <https://www.cmeplus.si/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2012-EHEA-Mobility-Strategy.pdf>



access to a European labour market, cooperation between higher education institutions, national reforms in European context and international competitiveness and dialogue and enhanced cooperation with the other world regions. It states that 15 years of voluntary convergence and an intergovernmental approach has allowed for 'the construction of two main pillars of the EHEA': a common framework and a number of common tools.

The common framework referred to consisted of the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA, ECTS, common principles for the development of student-centred learning, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, a common Register of Quality Assurance Agencies, a common approach to recognition and – very interesting – a 'common body of methodologies and sustainable achievements produced by European HEIs'. Being not articulated further, it seems that the last part refers in particular to Tuning or Tuning related Thematic Framework Programmes initiatives besides the many projects focussing on the establishment of Joint Degrees. The tools identified in the paper ECTS User's Guide, the DS and the Lisbon Recognition Convention – ironically originated all from before the start of the Bologna Process and were therefore no direct result of the Process.

Stating that the original common vision still stood, it identified four main lessons learned, that is:

- the vision had not been well communicated to or understood by higher education and other societal actors, and was interpreted differently when 'used as leverage for national reforms' or simply as 'a bureaucratic requirement to comply with';
- an obvious mistake had been made not distinguishing clearly between the structural reforms at national level and the actual implementation at grass-roots level being the higher education institutions and their staff;
- the notion of student-centred learning had 'not always' being clearly recognized as the 'main pillar of the European degree structure and had not been sufficiently assimilated and implemented by the academic community';
- the complexity of a process involving 47 countries striving towards common goals, had experienced tensions between a pan-European approach versus national diversity; the parallel understanding of the vagueness of a process and (measurable) outcomes; top-down versus bottom-up approaches; common (minimum) standards versus flexibility; cooperation versus competitiveness; the global dimension versus the regional one.

As a result 'ownership' did not (really) develop over time among those primarily responsible for the implementation of the objectives going beyond the structural reforms, namely the higher education institutions and their staff.

In response to these perceived shortcomings in the Process, clusters of initiatives (formulated as approaches) were outlined to respond to five current ‘challenges’: implementation of the student-centred approach, higher education as a public good, demographic changes, contribution to scientific research, conflicts between countries and extremisms and the then current economic crisis. A remarkable combination of topics partly going beyond the Bologna objectives, but linked in the paper to the EHEA. Also this paper did not refer to any of the EU initiatives running parallel to the Bologna Process.

In the actual Communiqué, lending its discourse from this document, it is stressed that the vision should be renewed. Although stipulating that important incentives had been realized in the ‘process of voluntary convergence and coordinated reform of our higher education systems’, major steps still had to be made in realizing key objectives: enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching, fostering the employability of graduates throughout their working lives, making the systems more inclusive, and implementing agreed structural reforms. Although the tone of this communiqué is much more realistic than the Bucharest 2012 one, it nevertheless is re-labelling old wine in new bottles. The fact that it also did some self-reflection by asking ‘the BFUG to review and simplify its governance and working methods, to involve higher education practitioners in its work programme, and to submit proposals for addressing the issue of non-implementation of key commitments in time for our next meeting’ does little to make a convincing case. The alternative to stop activities at European level and to start with seriously implementing the objectives at national level, in particular in those countries lagging behind, was not considered seriously as an option. The show had to go on at least until 2020, the new deadline agreed 6 years earlier, for finalizing the EHEA.

Frustration about the lack of results is also shown by Sjur Bergan, the representative of the Council of Europe in the ministerial Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) since 15 years. He phrased it with dismay: ‘structural reforms continue to be one of its hallmarks’, adding that it has been more difficult to implement these than ‘originally thought or at least hoped for’. An initiative coming from the Structural Reforms Working Group (SRWG), installed for the 2012-2015 period by the Bologna Follow-up Group, to activate policies to put more pressure on countries ‘with unsatisfactory implementation of key structural reforms as demonstrated in the 2015 Implementation Report’ failed.<sup>214</sup>

A number of authors, including Sjur Bergan, has therefore concluded that the governance model applied so far did not work very well due to its voluntary character and that therefore a new strategy was required to ensure that commit-

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<sup>214</sup> Sjur Bergan, Structural Reforms in the European Higher Education Area: Update and Perspectives, in: *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*, 2015, no.1. 15-16.

ments would actually be met. A workable approach suggested, was to make the development of a European Higher Education Area, that is developing a shared architecture at system level, part of the EU decision making process.<sup>215</sup> This of course would have required political will of the EU member states (which seems to be lacking anyway), because (higher) education was not covered by the European Treaties. Although this meant to ask 20 non-EU member states to follow EU legislation, it is less strange than it seems at first sight, when taking the most recent Bologna Communiqué's into account. In particular, in the Bucharest 2012 Communiqué, the roles of the 47 signatory countries and the European Commission are intertwined, the countries acting as a sort of Council giving the European Commission specific tasks to implement. Having said this, embracing the EU model for decision making would not have made much difference regarding the fundamental challenges for reform: the differences between countries in the architecture and content of secondary education as a basis for admission to tertiary education<sup>216</sup> and the extension of the original system reforms towards reforms of the teaching and learning paradigm by pleading for a student-centred approach as a condition for making degree programmes relevant for society.

The harsh reality, however, is that countries were (and still are) simply not able to implement many of the original objectives due to national constraints<sup>217</sup> and therefore do not contribute to the convergence of policies, although some scholarly literature may suggest otherwise.<sup>218</sup> The judgement of a renowned Ger-

<sup>215</sup> Sacha Garben, *EU Higher Education Law. The Bologna Process and Harmonization by Stealth*, Alphen aan de Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 2011. See in particular the conclusions of this thorough study in the legal aspects of policy making at European level, 225-234.

<sup>216</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016, *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2016/17: Schematic Diagrams. Eurydice Facts and Figures*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. Retrieved from: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/9/9d/Structure\\_of\\_education\\_systems\\_2016\\_17.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/9/9d/Structure_of_education_systems_2016_17.pdf).

<sup>217</sup> Amélia Veiga, Bologna 2010. The moment of truth?, in: *European Journal of Education*. Special issue: The Bologna Process revisited. Vol 47, No. 3, 2012, pp. 378-391 and Cristina Sin, Academic understandings of and responses to Bologna: a three-country perspective, in: *European Journal of Education*. Special issue: The Bologna Process revisited. Vol. 47, No. 3, 2012, pp. 392-404.

<sup>218</sup> See for example: B. Haskel, Can a Weak Process Generate Strong Results? Entrepreneurial Alliances in the Bologna Process to Create a European Higher Education Area. Center for European Studies Working Paper Series 2008 (165); Barbara G. Haskel, Weak Process, Strong Results: Cooperation in European Higher Education, in: Ingeborg Tömmel and Amy Verdun, eds., *Innovative Governance in the European Union: The Politics of Multilevel Policymaking*. Boulder, Col: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009, pp. 273-288; Eva M. Voegtler, Christoph Knill and Michael Dobbins, To what extent does transnational communication drive cross-national policy convergence? The impact of the Bologna-process on domestic higher education policies, in: *Higher education*. Vol. 61, No. 1, 2011, pp. 77-94; Eva Maria Vögtle, *Higher Education Policy Convergence and the Bologna Process. A Cross-National Study*, concludes in her study that 'the Bologna Process has led to policy convergence across large number of Bologna countries, but beyond the adoption of similar policies, convergence in instrumental design or degree of implementation is less obvious', 173-174.

man scholar can only be supported; in 2009 already he dubbed the Process: ‘Rationalized Myths’.<sup>219</sup>

The preparation of the Paris Communiqué of 25 May 2018 was again an intensive process. As was the case for many of the earlier Communiqués, the initial drafts were rather weak and had the tendency (again) to repeat what had already been said. It took a serious effort from the European Commission, a number of countries and the key consultative members as well as some external experts, to arrive to a text that could be perceived as more ambitious, more innovative and allowing for progress. It contains three central themes: the challenge of fundamental values ‘in recent years in some of our countries’, the establishment of a ‘structured peer support approach based on solidarity, co-operation and mutual learning’, and finally a large section on learning and teaching.<sup>220</sup> The peer support model is a compromise, because the original idea was to draw up a ‘black list’ of countries focussing on the three key commitments:

- a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS
- compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

The first and the third commitment were already adopted in 2005 in the framework of the Bergen Communiqué and the second has been signed by all EHEA countries, except Greece. These commitments are also the focus points of the peer support model. There proved not to be sufficient political support among the signatory countries for blacklisting or – as an alternative – the introduction of a multi-speed model which would also indicate lack of progress. Among them, not least France, the host of the Paris Ministerial meeting, had its reservations – which was no wonder given its performance so far.

A major step forward in the Communiqué is the attention for teaching and learning. Being the very heart of the student-centred approach, it took 9 years since its explicit inclusion in the Leuven-Louvain Communiqué. But, better late than never. Stating that assurance and enhancement of the quality and relevance of learning and teaching had been the core mission for the last 20 years, the inclusion of the topic is motivated by the arguing that ‘now it is time to add co-operation in innovative learning and teaching practices’. It is the direct effect of the already mentioned 2013 report of the European Union High Level Group on

<sup>219</sup> Jürgen Schriewer, “Rationalized Myths” in European Higher Education. The Construction and Diffusion of the Bologna Model, in: *European Education*, Vol. 41, No.2, Summer 2009, pp. 31-51.

<sup>220</sup> Paris Communiqué, Paris, May 25th 2018. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101765/ministerial-conference-paris-2018.html>

the Modernisation of Higher Education.<sup>221</sup> Another factor, explicitly named in the Communiqué, is the ‘success of the first European Learning and Teaching Forum launched by the EUA’ in Paris on 28-29 September 2017, an outcome of the project ‘European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching’ (EFFECT).<sup>222</sup> The second Forum is planned for 2019. Around 300 participants, mainly university leadership and management, participated in the first. It seems a bit early to conclude whether this approach will be successful given the complexity and size of the challenges involved, in particular because a Forum is not an operational model for the training of teaching staff.

Again in this Communiqué the role of the EHEA countries and the European Commission activities are intertwined. Or, maybe better phrased, mixed up again: ‘We encourage the use of the Erasmus+ programme for increasing cooperation, beyond mobility, and achieving progress on the key commitments’. The ‘we’ is remarkable in this respect, with 20 signatory countries not having any responsibility for the EU budget. Another section is equally intriguing: ‘We take note with interest of the recent EU initiative on ‘European Universities’ and we will encourage all our higher education institutions to work in such new settings’. Besides the rather limited scope of this European Commission action– inspired by the French president Emmanuel Macron – it is reserved for EU universities only. But probably most astonishing after a process that started 20 years ago is the following remark: ‘We call on the BFUG to submit proposals in time for our 2020 meeting in order to enable higher education to fully play its role in meeting the challenges faced by our societies’. Was that not the main aim of the Sorbonne Declaration twenty years ago anyway?

## In conclusion

It is not a surprise that the countries involved in the Bologna Process went for an ultralight governance structure based on a sophisticated balance of roles and responsibilities, which did not jeopardise the responsibilities of governments for policy making at national level. It also was a first indication of the weakness of the Process, which was experienced as unavoidable, namely that it may not be really embraced by all countries involved. After the launch of the Lisbon

<sup>221</sup> High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe’s higher education institutions*. June 2013. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013.

<sup>222</sup> See for the preparatory work: European University Association, *EUA’s Learning and Teaching Initiative*

Report from the thematic peer groups. Brussels, November 2017. Retrieved on 7 July 2018: <http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/eua-s-learning-and-teaching-initiative---report-from-the-thematic-peer-groups-in-2017>

Strategy from which the concept of the Open Method of Coordination was borrowed, there was no way out anyway anymore. What will have helped is that the Process was welcomed, probably above expectation, by stakeholders and was able to build up momentum in subsequent years.

By opting for the Open Method of Coordination the Process limited itself to a one dimensional policy model. It would have made more sense to make the choice for a multi-level/ multi-actor model. It is not by coincidence that academics formulated this approach as a comprehensive theoretical framework from 2001, which obtained acceptance in a very short period of time. Had this approach as a model to organise activities and to steer the Process been taken on board, it would have done justice to the other levels involved in the modernisation of higher education: Not only the European Commission, but most of all the higher education institutions, their management, and the real implementation levels of faculties and schools, that is their academic staff and students. It would have been possible to set up expert and implementation groups in each of the member states, which could have served as input for higher political levels, but also as catalysts for implementation.

Although the use of the term ‘harmonization’ became less sensitive over time, the countries kept stipulating that they found pride in developing and organising Bologna as an intergovernmental endeavour outside the realm of the EU, doing justice to the arrangement that higher education was a national responsibility. They tried to minimize the role of the European Commission in the Process both in decision making and in the public debate, but were at the same time aware they could not do without the services of the European Commission/ Union, including the financial ones. However, by running its own show an artificial contradiction was created with EU policies. What is ironical in this respect, is that late comers in the Process, in particular non-European Union members, slowed down and even undermined its success by not feeling very committed or able to implement(all) its aims and objectives. These grew from 6 to 10, making it a very complicated endeavour. Nevertheless, for good reasons in particular the first six years of the Process can be judged as being rather successful, resulting in key tools for implementation. Only five years later, after the publication of the *Bologna Process Independent Assessment* which did not describe the Process in terms of an overwhelming success, the image turned.

It has to be acknowledged at the same time that not only newcomers but also the vast majority of original signatory countries did not prove to be able to handle the growing number of objectives well, missing the financial means and meeting (as a result) resistance to reform from the higher education sector. In particular from 2003, the Berlin summit, onward it was slowly understood that not only systems should be revised, but teaching and learning itself as well. This culminated in the support for the student-centred approach at the 2009 summit,

a point already made by the European Commission in the 1990s and the Tuning initiative from 2000 as will be outlined in chapter 6, *Output versus Input*. Having given no attention to the required alignment of decision-making and implementation levels with (higher education management) and within (faculties/ schools and academic staff and students) higher education institutions, it was no surprise success was limited.

It seems fair to state in this context that the Rectors' Conferences and its successor, the European University Association, can partly be held responsible for this. As has been shown above, they presented them/itself as (a) major player(s) on behalf of the Rectors of universities, claiming to be able to steer the reform process at the higher education institutional level and to deliver when sufficient means would be made available, financially and in terms of governing autonomy. This was a serious overestimation of power and influence, reflecting 'ego politics' of former Rectors, who made up the board, with the ambition to continue to play a central role. By presenting itself so strongly, the EUA and its predecessors created the impression that the higher education institutions would (be able to) take care of the actual implementation of the objectives. By doing so in practice it misled the Bologna Follow-up Group. This image of having high influence was also fed by the succeeding Trends Reports and its position papers and topical papers. Of course, the EUA at several occasions highlighted the role of academics and students in the implementation of the Process as has been noted, but it did not give these observations a serious follow-up.

ESIB/ESU can be reproached similarly. On the one hand the students played a central role in the Process, not only broadening the agenda by bringing in the social dimension and the student perspective, but also by showing its shortcomings and lack of progress and consistency. On the other hand the students presented themselves as the representatives of the national unions and organisations and therefore of millions of students. It became clear in the course of time however, that they fell in love with their role as policymakers. At the same time, they failed in aligning the international and national levels and involving the actual student population. As a result, students at grass-root level were never seriously informed about the (added value of the) Bologna Process by their student representatives. It is one of the explanations why students in Germany, Austria and Spain protested against 'Bologna'.

The role of the Commission went beyond its intended role of main financial contributor of the Process. By initiating and supporting many strategic initiatives directly or indirectly related to the Process – including many (grass-root) initiatives, projects organised and coordinated by higher education institutions –, it was able to influence the discourse. Indeed, in nearly all of the frameworks and tools the hand of the European Commission is present and sometimes clearly visible. But does this also mean that it was able to make a serious impact? Prob-

ably at the policy level it did – although countries might not like to admit this. At the actual implementation level the European Commission's influence seems rather limited. The Commission started well as has been shown by developing the ERASMUS scheme, including ECTS, and other influential initiatives. Its policy documents however, maybe with the exception of those relating to quality assurance and recognition and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, had no serious impact at the level of Higher Education institutions. By organising the international group of ECTS experts, by offering academic fields the opportunity to organise themselves at European level in Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs) and by supporting initiatives such as Tuning it created in principle for itself a good basis for policy intervention.

All these initiatives had in common that they created a direct link between the European Union/European Commission level and academics and international relation officers within Higher Education institutions. However, half way the first decade of the Process it gave-up this position. When in 2004 the Commission proposed to transform the group of international ECTS experts into Bologna Experts, the countries forced the Commission to shift the responsibility to the national level making it national teams financed by European funds. The European Commission also terminated the financing of TNPs and gave up its steering role to select projects that would strengthen its own political agenda. It moved to a review system using independent external experts for projects submitted which was organised semi-independently through a special European Commission agency, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). By doing so it limited fundamentally its direct influence to reform higher education from inside the universities.

When the outcomes of the Tuning EU-US Study on the implementation of the learning outcomes based approach are taken seriously, one has to admit that the Bologna Process in key aspects still has a long way to go and that success is not guaranteed. This is no surprise giving the way the Bologna Process was set-up, trying desperately to keep it separate from Commission initiatives and by not understanding that the involvement of all levels of decision making should have had priority. Also it was not understood at the time that the paradigm change from staff-centred to student-centred learning would require informed and trained staff, being aware of current methodologies and new approaches regarding curriculum design and development and learning, teaching and assessment. As the Tuning Study has shown this is not (yet) the case, the very vast majority of staff never having received any pedagogical training to teach in higher education and therefore 'driving without a license'. Only in mid-2013 the report of the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, initiated by the European Commission, was published on *Improving the quality of teaching and*



*learning in Europe's higher education institutions, exactly 15 years after the Sorbonne Declaration.*

It offers some other clear messages: organising a voluntary process with an agenda that is wide and not really articulated and on top is broadened over time, involving a growing number of countries, makes it impossible to reach a substantial level of success. What can be noted after two decades of effort, is that regarding the main objectives of the Process, the three cycle level model has been largely implemented but remains a patchwork, consistent use of ECTS is still lacking, problems continue with the recognition of foreign degrees, accreditation decisions are still not portable in most countries and the issue of trans-border quality assurance is very far from being a reality.

If we have a final look again at the theoretical concepts of convergence et al., it has to be concluded on the basis of the progress made that so far serious and broad conversion at system level – let alone harmonisation – has not been reached, even when the widest definition is applied. Without doubt cross-national policy diffusion has taken place and there are also examples of policy transfer, but that is it. The commitments made in the course of time by all governments involved, in a Declaration and 8 Communiqués, spanning now 20 years come close to 'virtual conversion', that is an endless repetition of intentions creating an image of success, which however is not underpinned by real implementation policies covering the wide range of Bologna objectives in the vast majority of cases. Not something to be very proud of.

However, it is fair to highlight that the message of lack of success and progress over time, was acknowledged when preparing the Yerevan Communiqué of 2015 and since. As we have seen, this is reflected in the Paris Communiqué of 2018 in two ways: a model for structured peer support intended for overcoming underperforming countries and – for the very first time in the Bologna Process – extensive attention for 'innovative teaching and learning' and pedagogical training and continuous professional development of higher education teachers. One may hope, it will trigger a fresh start, leading to better results.



### 3. Working Towards the Credit. Creating a Stable Basis for Comparison and Compatibility in a Globalizing World. Myth or Reality?

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#### ABSTRACT

*Without a decade of experience in developing and rolling out the European student and staff mobility programme European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS), which was launched in 1987, and underpinned by the European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS) from 1989 on, it is highly doubtful that European-wide discussions would have developed about the role and position of European higher education in the world. These discussions, which led to serious concerns, gave way to the Sorbonne and Bologna Ministerial Declarations of respectively 1998 and 1999. There would not have been a Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project either, which was set-up as a grass-root response of the higher education world to the political initiatives. The two Declarations and the Tuning project shared the aim to modernise European higher education with the intention to boost its quality and to make it more competitive. It was (the) ECTS that offered the platform for the discussions and therefore these initiatives cannot be properly understood without any knowledge of the origin and history of this system. This publication offers insight into the process of the development of ECTS, which was launched as a means to facilitate recognition of studies before and after a mobility period. The development of ECTS had to start from scratch because worldwide there was no experience in setting up and running a national and/or international student workload-based transfer system that applied credit points. To define ECTS a Pilot Scheme (1989-1995) was set up involving five subject areas – and in three stages 145 higher education institutions – which had the objective to develop a sustainable, robust and reliable tool to facilitate international student mobility. Based on the notions of trust and confidence and the concept of ‘relative’ student workload, it was unique. It opted for 60 credit points to represent one academic year. Initially there was doubt that developing a reliable workload based model for the higher education sector of the 12 member states of the European Communities would be possible at all.*

*Those doubts proved to be unfounded. Already in 1993 it was agreed after a thorough evaluation by the consultancy firm Coopers & Lybrand, that ECTS was ready for further extension. However, the actual expansion started in 1996 after the Pilot Scheme phase had ended. The European Commission made substantial funds available for this expansion. It also set up national contact points and an international group of informed counsellors, which would grow over time. In the final years of the 20th century the idea came up to use*

*ECTS principles and approaches as a facilitator for the development of lifelong learning in the European context. The initiation and development of ECTS can be perceived as the fruit of the commitment and vision of a relatively small number of European Commission officials supported by a small group of academics and administrators.*

## Introduction

‘One of the most expensive dinner clubs of Europe’, it was characterized by one of the professors involved in the Pilot Scheme of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System, abbreviated as ECTS. This qualification is an obvious reflection of the fact that around 1990, when this remark was made, academic and non-academic university staff were not used to discuss higher education at face-to-face meetings in a transnational setting. Both types of employees were involved in the development of the system: the non-academic staff as institutional coordinator, representing university management, and the academic staff as departmental coordinator, representing one of five disciplines involved, which were named subject areas. The feasibility study was set up for a six-year period, from 1989 to 1995. The European Commission selected Business Administration, Chemistry, History, Mechanical Engineering and Medicine as a representation of the five academic sectors, respectively Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Humanities, Engineering and Health Care to set-up and test the system.

With the recommendation in mind of the Pietro Adonnino Ad Hoc Committee ‘A People’s Europe’ to develop a European academic credit transfer scheme to facilitate mobility<sup>223</sup> as a foundation for recognition of periods of studies taken abroad, the ERASMUS Bureau was asked by Hywel Ceri Jones and Domenico Lenarduzzi, the senior education officials at the Commission, to set-up an experimental and voluntary Pilot Scheme with direct involvement of higher education institutions.<sup>224</sup> This ERASMUS Bureau was established in 1987 by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) on request of the European Commission to manage the ERASMUS programme.<sup>225</sup> Its staff was seconded from the ECF and other organisations.

<sup>223</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *A People’s Europe. Report from the ad hoc Committee*. Bulletin of the European Communities. Supplement 7/1985. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1985, 25. Retrieved from: [http://aei.pitt.edu/992/1/andonnino\\_report\\_peoples\\_europe.pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/992/1/andonnino_report_peoples_europe.pdf)

<sup>224</sup> European Commission, 87/327/EEC: Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus). Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX-%3A31987D0327>

<sup>225</sup> European Cultural Foundation, ECF and the ERASMUS Exchange Programme – 30 years of student exchange. August 3, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/>

The legal basis for the request to develop ECTS was the ERASMUS Programme – a backronym standing for *EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students* – which had been proposed on 3 January 1986 by the European Commission to the European Council. It involved as Action 3 (out of a total of 4 Actions): Measures to improve academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study, comprising of the creation of a course credit transfer system valid throughout the European Community; national information centres, and development of joint curricula.<sup>226</sup> It was Alan Smith, appointed director of the ERASMUS Bureau in 1987, who came up with the name ERASMUS.<sup>227</sup> He fulfilled this job until 1992. Smith was an obvious choice because he had been the director of the ECF Office for Cooperation in Education (OCE) based in Brussels. This unit was responsible for the organization and implementation of the immediate predecessors of ERASMUS, the European Communities pilot projects, the Joint Study Programmes and the Short Study Visits schemes.<sup>228</sup> The ERASMUS programme was adopted by the Council on 15 June 1987 after some 18 months of turbulent discussions among the then 12 members of the European Community.<sup>229</sup>

Preparatory work for ECTS was done by Fritz Dalichow, Assistant Director of the ERASMUS Bureau and as such responsible for academic recognition and credit transfer matters. Dalichow had a background as credential evaluator in the German Office for Foreign Education.<sup>230</sup> In 1985 he was appointed Secretary of

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library/ecf-and-erasmus; A-M. Autissier, *The European Cultural Foundation: A look back at fifty years of activity (1954-2004)*. Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2004, 10.

<sup>226</sup> European Commission, Press Release Database. Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-86-145\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-86-145_en.htm)

<sup>227</sup> Siegbert Wuttig, Die Entstehung des Programm namens ERASMUS, in: *DAADeuroletter. ERASMUS Happy Birthday, ERASMUS! Die Erfolgsgeschichte der Europäischen Union feiert 25-Jährigen Bestehen*. Sonderausgabe. Nationale Agentur für EU-Hochschulzusammenarbeit. August 2013, 9.

<sup>228</sup> European Cultural Foundation, ECG and the ERASMUS Exchange Programme – 30 years of student exchange. August 3, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/ecf-and-erasmus>; A-M. Autissier, *The European Cultural Foundation: A look back at fifty years of activity (1954-2004)*. ECF: Amsterdam, 2004.

<sup>229</sup> Ann Corbet, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge. Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Union Higher Education Policy, 1955-2005*. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. In this book in particular chapter 8, Attaining a Goal: The Erasmus Decision, 1985-87, 118-148.

<sup>230</sup> John Harris, Cross National Comparison and exchange: Higher Education, in: Urban Dahllöf et al, *Dimensions of Evaluation: Report of the IMHE Study Group on Evaluation in higher education*. Higher Education Policy Series 13. London: Jessica Kingley Publishers, 1991 OECD, 156; Alma Craft, ed., *Quality Assurance in Higher Education*. Proceedings of an International Conference *Hong Kong 1991*. London: The Falmer Press, 1992, 236. In 1986 Dalichow, together with Ulrich Teichler, published *Higher education in the European Community: recognition of study abroad in the European Community: the findings of a survey of "joint study programmes"* prepared at the request of the Office for Cooperation in Education for the Commission of the European Communities. Luxembourg, 1986.

the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs) in Brussels. At the ERASMUS Bureau he was assisted by the Programme Officer Mary O'Mahony, a University of Cork BA honours graduate in European Studies, appointed in 1987, as a follow-up of an internship at the European Communities Higher Education division.<sup>231</sup> The task of the ERASMUS Bureau was twofold: the preparation and launch of a 'Call for expressions of interest from universities' to identify higher education institutions willing to participate and to develop a basic theoretical framework and methodology to develop the ECTS system and to test it in practice.

The Call was published on 27 July 1988 in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Universities were invited to show their interest before the end of October. The selection would be finalised one month later. In the Call a distinction was made between preparatory work and a Pilot Phase of six years to starting in the academic year 1989-1990. Full documentation on the Pilot Phase could be obtained on request from the ERASMUS Bureau. The key concept – mutual confidence – as expressed in this documentation was stipulated in the Call:

'ECTS constitutes an innovative approach to the academic recognition and credit transfer problem in Europe. On the basis of cooperation founded on the principle of mutual confidence between all participating universities, students will receive academic credit for course units, intermediate examinations and final academic qualifications for the purpose of continuing their studies at another university within the ECTS system. Universities participating in ECTS will do so on a voluntary basis, once selected by the Commission on the basis of their applications.'<sup>232</sup>

In 1987-1988 the ERASMUS Bureau defined a set of basic features which were turned into a brochure – the full documentation that could be obtained on request according to the Call – which was pro-actively translated in the languages of the member states and sent to all higher education institutions in the summer of 1988, accompanied by an invitation to apply for participation.<sup>233</sup> In two scholarly papers published in 1991 and 1992 respectively, Fritz Dalichow outlined and explained the choice for the concept (a credit system based on the notion of student workload) and its principles. An important source of inspiration was the

<sup>231</sup> European Commission, *What is ECTS?* Leaflet prepared by the ERASMUS Bureau. Brussels, 1989; LinkedIn profile Mary O'Mahoney.

<sup>232</sup> European Commission, ERASMUS European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Call for expressions of interest from universities (88/C 197/08). *Official Journal of the European Communities* No C 197/11 27.7.1988. Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC\\_1988\\_197\\_R\\_0011\\_01&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC_1988_197_R_0011_01&from=EN)

<sup>233</sup> Fritz Dalichow, Mutual Recognition and Transfer of Credits, in: Alma Craft ed., *Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Proceedings of an International Conference Hong Kong 1991*. London: The Falmer Press, 1992, 189.

US credit system, which Dalichow stipulated correctly was not a national system meant for transfer, but a system used by several thousands of different types of higher education institutions to organize study programmes. The US system, also known as the Carnegie System, was developed at the end of the nineteenth century. The number of credits in this system is fixed on the basis of the number of class hours, called credit hours. One year of successful studies represents 32 credits, that is 16 per semester. Dalichow concluded that the system might work well as a credit system, but it did far less well as a mechanism for transfer of periods of studies. This was due to the different types of institutions in the US, ranging from Community Colleges to Research Universities, as well as to the difference in level. It did not seem the ideal basis to start a credit transfer system in Europe. Nevertheless, he identified three ‘tools’ which he thought worth ‘borrowing’ for the development of ECTS: the idea of the credit itself, the ‘American institutional calendar or catalogue’ and the ‘transcript of records’.<sup>234</sup>

After selecting the universities to participate in the five subject area groups, applying the rule that larger countries (DE, ES, FR, IT and UK) would participate with two institutions and smaller ones (BE, DK, GR, IR, NL and PT) with one university in each group, it chose five group coordinators. These were taken from the departmental coordinators, whose details were included in the applications of the universities. The selected coordinators, who became in practice part of the management team to develop the ECTS Pilot Scheme until 1995, were: Jean-Jacques Bonnet (Toulouse/ Chemistry), Willy Dutré (Leuven/ Mechanical Engineering), Steven Fox (Lancaster/ Business Administration), Joao Relvas (Coimbra/ Medicine) and Robert Wagenaar (Groningen/ History). These academics were called *subject area coordinators* (SACs) on suggestion of the group coordinator from Groningen. They were invited for a preparatory meeting, which preceded the first ECTS Plenary Meeting. The meeting was co-chaired by Angelika Verli-Wallace, representing the European Commission, and Alan Smith. Verli and Dalichow would become the public faces of ECTS in the years to come, and were nicknamed its mother and father. The first Plenary Meeting was hosted by the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) on 26 and 27 January 1989. At this meeting the 84 selected higher education institutions (81) and consortia (3) were represented. These would act as the ‘Inner Circle’ of the project. Those not selected, were invited to become part of an Outer Circle. The latter would be kept informed about the progress of the Pilot Scheme, open to those interested in the Scheme at any time, but would not be involved in the development process or obtain any financial support. A total of 720 departments from 308 higher education institu-

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<sup>234</sup> Fritz Dalichow, European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS): A Leading Concept for TransEuropean and Trans-Atlantic Student Exchange?, in: *Higher Education Policy*. Vol. 4, No. 3, 1991, 44-45.

tions covering nearly the full spectrum of academic subject areas (though not limited to the five covered in the Pilot) expressed interest in 1988 to be part of the Outer Circle.<sup>235</sup>

The number of Inner Circle institutions was (significantly) higher than the number included in the initial plans, namely 77 compared to 20 originally.<sup>236</sup> It showed the interest of the educational sector in this bold new initiative. The Commission received a total of 464 applications from 254 higher education institutions. The selection was made on the basis of the following five criteria: strength in the academic field concerned, regional outreach of the institution, commitment towards European cooperation, proven interest in the mobility of credits and ECTS and the motivation to support the structures of the Pilot Scheme. The total number of persons that would attend the first General Meeting was 170.<sup>237</sup>

All in all, it was a rather small team – ERASMUS Bureau, Commission staff and the five subject area coordinators – that took on the responsibility to steer the process of developing ECTS. The team was not only small, but also rather inexperienced regarding the topic involved – the development of a credit transfer system to be applied in all twelve European Community member states. None of them had any serious experience with the application of the notion of student workload and a related credit system.

At the time, the only country in Europe that had introduced the philosophy of student workload in higher education was the Netherlands. In 1976 a guideline had been formally defined to protect the student. It required that student workload was indicated in terms of hours and fixed at 1700 hours per year. This model could be – and actually was – also applied for transfer purposes between institutions within the Netherlands. From the academic year 1988-1989 a national credit system based on the concept of student workload was introduced by law: 42 credits per year equalling the planned number of working weeks per year, each week holding 40 working hours as in the case of a regular full-time

<sup>235</sup> Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschem*a. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 12.

<sup>236</sup> Siegbert Wüttig, Die Entwicklung von ECTS im Überblick. In Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), *Success Stories IV. Das European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in Deutschland.*, Bonn, 2001, 15.

<sup>237</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Annual Report ERASMUS Programme 1989 (COM (90) 128 Final). Brussels, 5 April 1990, 9; Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschem*a. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 13.



employee. This made 1680 hours a year, a number which is still included in the Dutch law for higher education.<sup>238</sup>

There were two other European Communities countries in which the notion of credit had been introduced: Portugal and the United Kingdom. In Portugal a law was introduced in 1980 which allowed the use of credits, but it was not compulsory and required the approval of the Ministry of Education. Many institutions did not make use of the possibility. The Portuguese Ministry of Education observed in 2006 – the year Portugal introduced ECTS as its credit system – that ‘assignment of credits to a course tends to be based on a rather rigid or even bureaucratic way of counting the number of classroom hours of teaching, without consideration for the student’s actual workload’.<sup>239</sup> The UK claims that the introduction of a credit system can be traced back to the 1960s, and was adopted by a significant number of polytechnics in the 1970s. In those years also the notion of credit transfer was introduced by the UK-wide Council of National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the Open University. CNAA launched the idea of a national Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) a decade later, in the second half of the 1980s with 120 credits per academic year, but only in 1998 a national higher education credit framework was created.<sup>240</sup>

The question answered in this chapter is how a small inexperienced team with the active support of the universities and their staff members involved in the Pilot Scheme turned an ambitious idea – possibly completely unrealistic – into a working system. A system that found wider implementation after its pilot phase.

## Starting from scratch

There was no experience regarding the use of credit (transfer) systems based on student workload when ECTS was introduced. The Adonnino Ad Hoc Committee probably had a sort of US Carnegie System in mind when it proposed to underpin its plan to set up a European Communities-wide mobility system. It realised at the same time that a system could not be imposed on the higher education institutions and their programmes and had to be implemented ‘by means of bilateral agreements or on a voluntary basis by universities and higher educa-

<sup>238</sup> M.J.F. Hulthof et al, *Studielastbepaling in Nederland en omliggende landen*. Nijmegen: IOWO instituut voor onderwijskundige dienstverlening, april 2000, 1, 5, 21-23.

<sup>239</sup> Report prepared by the Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education as input to the OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education. Country Background Report: Portugal. September 2006, paragraph 69. Retrieved on 23 May 2018 from: <https://www.oecd.org/portugal/37745972.pdf>

<sup>240</sup> Emma Ollard, et al, *Credit Transfer in Higher Education. A review of the literature*. UK Department of Education. March 2017, 28-30.

tion establishments which, by arrangements with one another, would determine the procedures for academic recognition of such credits’.

What was available at the time besides a political decision of the European Council? In transfer terms: the Inter-university Cooperation Programmes (ICPs), the core of the ERASMUS Programme launched in 1987, in which valid recognition arrangements had been made conditional, which was a major step forward to overcome the barrier for large-scale mobility. However, as Dalichow stipulated correctly at the time, ICPs operated in a closed environment, uniting typically similar departments and a fixed slot in a programme that suited mobility best. ECTS was intended to be more ambitious by facilitating mobility in a much more general and wider setting. Was there anything in this respect that we could learn from the US experience regarding transfer arrangements? If so, that would not be of much help. The US system in use was (and still is) based on *a posteriori* recognition procedure based on three elements: (1) the quality of institution from where to transfer the obtained credits, (2) the comparability of the nature, content and levels of credits awarded and (3) ‘the appropriateness and applicability of the awarded credit to the programme offered by the receiving institution, in light of the student’s educational goals’.<sup>241</sup>

In the eyes of the developers of ERASMUS, the aim of ECTS should be the establishment of an approach that would allow mobility – for which students themselves could decide place and duration at any moment during their studies – based on academic recognition *a priori*. It all boiled down to the assumption that ‘mutual confidence’ should and would offer a sufficiently reliable basis. Already at the launch of the Pilot Scheme it was decided that ‘trust’ was required in addition to ‘mutual confidence’, underpinning two hypotheses. Firstly, higher education institutions in the European Community are very different, but they are highly comparable in terms of quality. Secondly, academics will rely on the quality, course content and academic judgment of colleagues in other European Community countries. It should guarantee automatic *a priori* recognition. This was thought a realistic approach because in comparison with the hierarchical structure in the USA where higher education ranged from community colleges to flagship (private) universities, European higher education was perceived as much more egalitarian.

The first ECTS General meeting would show that both hypotheses could not be taken for granted. First of all, ECTS had to deal with particular national peculiarities such as the difference between Grandes Écoles (FR) and the Scuola Normale (IT) on the one hand, and regular universities on the other. There were also many countries with binary systems, making the distinction between re-

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<sup>241</sup> Fritz Dalichow, European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS), in: *Journal Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. 15, 1990, 45.

search-intensive universities and universities of applied sciences. Both types would be represented in the Pilot Scheme. Secondly, educational practice proved to differ more fundamentally than expected by the initiators of the Pilot Scheme. This was particularly the case for Business Administration and for History, due to the wide variety of courses on offer. It was initially – wrongly – presumed that programmes in those fields would be more flexible regarding credit transfer and recognition than more regulated and/or structured subject areas, such as medicine, mechanical engineering and chemistry. Programmes in some countries had clear structures, but not in others. Content of programmes was prescribed by government in some, while in other countries universities had full autonomy. In some countries education was based on knowledge transfer and acquisition by (only or mainly) using the model of lectures and oral examinations, while in others there was more focus on more active forms of learning reflected in a seminar approach. In other words, the different educational cultures and traditions in Europe, the Humboldtian, the Anglo-Saxon and the Napoleonic models proved to be a reality with which the Pilot Scheme had to learn to deal. No wonder that both inside the European Commission unit responsible for higher education, and in the higher education sector in general there were many that were rather sceptical about the feasibility of the introduction of ECTS.

The more technical aspects of defining ECTS were perceived as less challenging. First of all, the arbitrary choice was made to equal 60 credits with one full year of study. At the ECTS launch meeting at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in Brussels the European Commission explained this number by using the argument that 60 could easily be divided into 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, accommodating a semester (30), a trimester (20), a half semester (15) and a half trimester (10) model. What might have played a role, but was not expressed as such, was that 60 was more or less the double number (32 credit hours per year) applied in the US/ Carnegie System. More important was that 60 was a handy number when allocating credits to individual course units – allowing for great flexibility –, also in the case of a modularised system, as was the case in the US. In the US a credit hour represents 39 to 42 student working hours, that is 3 hours x 13 to 14 semester weeks. This makes 1248 – 1344 hours per academic year. A credit hour represents either one lecture hour plus two hours of independent work (preparation and assignments) or 3 lab hours. Besides this model also variations are in use, with small deviations to the one described.<sup>242</sup> The practical tools ‘borrowed’ from the US system, that is the course catalogue and the transcript of records, proved indeed to be essential for developing ECTS.

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<sup>242</sup> When the UK had to decide on its model, the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS), it also chose for a high number of credits per academic year, that is 120, to facilitate flexibility.

The first two ECTS General meetings, both part of the preparatory phase, were decisive for the future of the Pilot Scheme. The institutions involved proved to be willing to accept the ECTS model and its main features as presented by the European Commission and the ERASMUS Bureau, but they did request a higher budget than originally reserved by the Commission for their efforts during the first 18 months of the Pilot. As a result of a firm discussion each institution would obtain ECU 13.415 instead of the planned ECU 10.000.<sup>243</sup> This was the maximum amount the European Commission could afford. Furthermore, each institution would receive ECU 10.000 for 5 ECTS student mobility grants covering a full academic year of studies. As in the case of the regular ERASMUS mobility scheme, which had (much) lower grants, the ECTS grants would be made available through the services of national agencies. This rather substantial grant for the ECTS mobility should make participation attractive.<sup>244</sup>

In return for the institutional grant the Institutional and the Departmental Coordinator of each higher education institution were expected to take up a number of tasks. For the Departmental Coordinator the very first was to allocate a number of credits to each course unit of the involved programme(s). This number should be based on the 'relative value' of a particular course unit in a programme, but at the same time reflect what a typical student would be able to do during one academic year. The outcome of this exercise required validation of his or her department. We will return to this topic again because of its complexity and principle.

Both the Institutional and Departmental coordinators were made responsible for the production of an ECTS Information Package with a fixed model, which contained an institutional and a departmental part. Items to be covered in the first part were: name and general description of the higher education institution, academic calendar and enrolment procedure (general and academic terms, language requirements, specific terms for ECTS-students), and, furthermore, information about accommodation available, healthcare and insurance procedures and the average living costs. The information of the department was split into two: a description of the unit itself and a description of the course units on offer. The first part covered the name of the departmental coordinator, a description of the department, including fields of specialisation, an outline of the degree programmes (structure, length, type of degree and diploma, rules and regulations), and enrolment procedures. The second part provided details about each individual course unit: the number of teaching hours per week, type of delivery (lecture, seminar, lab work), period of the year taught, type of assessment and

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<sup>243</sup> ECU stands for European Currency Unit and became the construct for the Euro from 1999. Notes and coins were introduced 3 years later on 1 January 2002.

<sup>244</sup> *Erasmus Newsletter* No. 1. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1989, 10. Last time retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: [http://aei.pitt.edu/81797/1/1989\\_Volume\\_-\\_No\\_1.pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/81797/1/1989_Volume_-_No_1.pdf)

the number of ECTS credits allocated to the course unit, a description of its content (up to 10 lines) and the name of the teacher.<sup>245</sup> The ECTS information package had to be published in English and the native language (if different).

At the first two General ECTS meetings, of which the second was hosted by the University of Navarre in Pamplona on 11-12 April 1989, a number of key challenges were identified and discussed. Linguistic preparation, seen as a shared responsibility of sending and receiving institutions, was perceived as a key factor for successful studies. To facilitate the mobility period emphasis was put on 'excellent advanced counselling' and 'provisions for appropriate reception and accommodation facilities' upon arrival. Other issues discussed were the differences in academic calendars, evaluation of the pilot scheme and the computerization to support the organisation of the mobility process.<sup>246</sup> Due to the fact that the personal computer had not been widely introduced yet in the first half of the 1990s, and wide use of e-mail only took place in the second half of the 1990s, the postal services would be the main instrument for exchanging information during the pilot phase, besides phone and telefax.

Regarding the academic calendars three rather fundamental issues were addressed: the structure of the academic year – undivided versus semester and trimester systems –, length of the academic year, and start and finish of teaching and exam periods. With recognition of studies abroad being the major concern, a mobility period in most cases should cover a full academic year. Another effect was that it had to be agreed that more flexibility in granting credit was required when awarding a final degree or diploma in the setting of the ECTS Pilot Scheme than in the case of the regular ERASMUS scheme. As part of the pilot scheme it was foreseen that not all students would return to their university of origin, but would continue their studies at the host university to obtain its diploma.<sup>247</sup>

This philosophy and principle was explained on the basis of the exemplary but fictional Dutch history student Wim Mulder in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the ECTS Users' Guide published in 1990.<sup>248</sup> Mulder, who had good knowledge of German, English and French started his academic studies in the Netherlands, where he was awarded the *Propedeuse* degree after completing one year of studies. Then he moved to a German university where after another year of studies he met the requirements for the *Diplomvorprüfung* or *Zwischenprüfung*. Having been awarded two intermediate degrees, he then took up his studies at an English universi-

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<sup>245</sup> Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschema*. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 21, 34-35.

<sup>246</sup> *Erasmus Newsletter* No. 1, 10.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>248</sup> This type of mobility indeed occurred in reality during the Pilot Phase years, although the number was limited.

ty, where he obtained a Bachelor degree after one more year of successful studies. This BA was his entrance ticket to a fourth year in France to be awarded the *Maîtrise* after another successful year of studies. In total Mulder obtained 240 ECTS credits.<sup>249</sup> This tour de force was visualized in a full colour poster showing Wim Mulder and his red sports car which would drive him from country to country to pick up ECTS credits and degrees. The sports car is a wink to the one owned by Fritz Dalichow.<sup>250</sup> Besides this poster, the ERASMUS Bureau produced another 3 or 4 posters with different images and messages which were distributed to the Inner Circle universities to draw attention to the ECTS Pilot Scheme. They came in addition to a leaflet that offered a short introduction to ECTS Pilot Scheme and listed the participating higher education institutions, including the names of the institutional and departmental coordinators participating in the Pilot Scheme.<sup>251</sup> On top each of the subject area groups also produced a leaflet at the request of the European Commission. It shows that the Pilot Scheme was supported by a constant flow of promotion and information materials.

A serious concern proved to be a balanced distribution of mobility students over the different member states and institutions. At the Pamplona meeting, it was decided to introduce the principle of clearing house meetings to be held before the summer break. However, even after the clearing house there was still an imbalance in the first year in the distribution of the 569 students that participated in the scheme. Increasingly, Belgium, The Netherlands, Ireland and the UK became the net 'importers'. Over the years – due to the clearing house procedures and pro-active behaviour (language preparation and pre-selection for less popular destinations) of students interested in the scheme – the overall balance improved.<sup>252</sup>

## Running a project

While ERASMUS was set up as a programme, the ECTS Pilot Scheme had all the characteristics of a project. As a project, it met the definition of 'a tempo-

<sup>249</sup> Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschem. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 17-18, 24-25.

<sup>250</sup> Robert Wagenaar, An Introduction to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), in: Eric Froment, Jürgen Kohler, Lewis Purser and Lesley Wilson, eds., *EUA Bologna Handbook, Making Bologna Work*, Vol 1, B 2.4-1, Berlin, Stuttgart, 2006: Jacob Raabe Verlag, 1.

<sup>251</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. European Community Course Credit Transfer System*. Leaflet. Brussels, 1989.

<sup>252</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report ERASMUS Programme*. COM (90) 128 Final. Brussels, 5 April 1990, 10.

rary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service'.<sup>253</sup> Uncertainty is a key feature of any project. It relates to factors such as planning, implementation, timeline, budget, but in particular the achievement of its goals. Regarding uncertainty, a distinction can be made between operational and contextual factors. The operational ones are related to the implementation process itself and can range from highly innovative to more routine-based. The contextual factors can be impacted by a number of elements: the (un)known environment, scope and status of the project and the possibilities to influence its effects and, finally, predictions regarding its outcomes. It is well acknowledged that projects have a tendency to overrun in time and budget as a result of one or both factors. This in particular is the case for larger and more complicated projects. The level of uncertainty is also related to the amount of information available. Constant monitoring and evaluation influence (a successful) outcome. In addition, project management is an important element.<sup>254</sup>

As in all projects, also in the ECTS Pilot Scheme multiple roles/ players can be distinguished: a client or financier – the European Commission, the project operator or management – the ERASMUS Bureau plus the five subject area coordinators (SACs) and the users – the higher education institutions and their students. The features of a project as described above highly correlate with the ECTS Pilot Scheme. Although for ECTS the project purpose was defined as part of the planning phase, less clear was what the final product should be. In this respect, it is interesting to note that according to project theory a distinction is made between the perspectives of the three players identified. While the focus of the European Commission was in particular on the project purpose – developing a working model for student mobility guaranteeing full recognition – the users were more interested in the immediate goal, that is a smooth implementation process. The main focus of the management team, ERASMUS Bureau and SACs was the quality of the product. This implied a high level of monitoring in which the SACs and the Bureau had different roles. The Bureau concentrated on the more technical aspects while the SACs had their eye in particular on content related aspects. As academics, they had an understanding of their academic field, communalities and differences in approaches applied and the challenges related to student mobility. Coordinating the activities of the Subject Area Groups, organizing and presiding its meetings, they acted as the intermediate between Commission and ERASMUS Bureau and as the confidant of their groups. It was a challenging role because at the same time they were part of the management team of the Pilot Scheme.

<sup>253</sup> Project Management Institute (PMI), What is Project Management? Retrieved on 1 May 2018 from: <https://www.pmi.org/about/learn-about-pmi/what-is-project-management>

<sup>254</sup> Knut Samset, Features of a project. Extract from the textbook *'Project Evaluation. Making Investments Succeed.'* Tapir Academic Press, 2003. Retrieved on 1 May 2018 from: [https://www.ntnu.no/documents/1261860271/1262022437/058\\_2004\\_samset\\_what\\_is\\_a\\_project.pdf](https://www.ntnu.no/documents/1261860271/1262022437/058_2004_samset_what_is_a_project.pdf)

To complicate matters the users were at the same time participants of the project and expected to deliver. This implied inbuilt tensions between the different players and their expectations, which proved not always to be fully aligned. The annual final reports of the subject area coordinators are illuminating in this respect. Each of the five subject area coordinators was asked to produce a rather detailed report based on a fixed format covering, for example, coordination work on ECTS Information Packages, information activities at Commission and Institutional level, contributing to the resolution of specific problems at the level of participating institutions and an analysis of implemented student mobility and credit transfer. Complementary to the monitoring process, was the survey of student opinions regarding the outcomes. The most relevant one concerns the academic year 1989-90, implemented by a team led by Ulrich Teichler. Teichler had also been made responsible for the evaluation of the ICPs of ERASMUS.<sup>255</sup>

Given the type of project and the role of its participants, the applied approach can be called ‘educational action research’, which made it an action research project. This was also how Coopers & Lybrand labelled the Pilot in its ECTS evaluation report of 1993 (see below), because it was designed to test as well as to refine ECTS principles and mechanisms.<sup>256</sup> Action research as a concept was developed shortly after WWII, and related to education in the UK in the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. It is a method which is applied for improving practice, and involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection. Changes in practice are implemented on the basis of evidence gathered. It is participative and collaborative, situation-based and context specific. Reflection is developed based on interpretations made by the participants, and knowledge is created through action and at the point of application. It may involve problem solving, if the desired outcome is the improvement of practice. Finally, findings will emerge as action develops, but these are not conclusive or absolute.<sup>257</sup>

Naming the ECTS Pilot Scheme an action research project seems to be accurate given the overwhelming number of issues and challenges that required discussion and solution. As we will see, for many only provisional solutions or practical compromises could be found. Cultural differences as well as a wide variety of educational formats proved to be very real. The contribution of the

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<sup>255</sup> Friedrich Maiworm, Wolfgang Steube and Ulrich Teichler, *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration: The View of the Students*. ERASMUS Monographs No.15. Werkstattberichte – Band 37. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1992.

<sup>256</sup> Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, *Evaluation of the pilot phase of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Final Report*. Brussels: Coopers & Lybrand, February 1993, paragraph 14.

<sup>257</sup> Valsa Koshy, *Action Research for Improving Educational Practice. A Step-by-step guide*. London: Sage, Second Edition, 2010, 2 and 4. Retrieved from: [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/36584\\_01\\_Koshy\\_et\\_al\\_Ch\\_01.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/36584_01_Koshy_et_al_Ch_01.pdf)



ECTS Pilot Scheme was that it made differences visible, which is a condition for building trust and confidence.

Including the two general meetings, which were part of the start-up phase, a total of five general meetings or plenary meetings as they were called, took place during the lifespan of the project. Besides these, there were subject area meetings, on average two per year. Also site visits to individual institutions were organized. The additional three plenaries took place in Copenhagen, on 19-21 February 1990, in Thessaloniki, 30 November – 2 December 1991 and Toulouse on 25-27 October 1992. They all followed a comparable format, which would be copied and refined by Tuning for its meetings a decade later. A preparatory meeting of the Management team, followed by two meeting days constituting of a plenary meeting at the start and end, and subject area group meetings in between. The plenary meetings, in particular the opening sessions, were mainly perceived as ‘political’ by its participants – the Commission explaining its position and policies – while the gatherings of the groups were seen as the real working meetings. Although there were a number of topics that were clearly overarching, most proved to be subject specific. Nevertheless, the importance of these general meetings should not be underestimated, because they offered a platform for discussing highly relevant topics for student mobility in general. Student mobility initiated by ERASMUS at a scale never applied before did indeed identify issues to be solved. ECTS proved not only to be applicable as a Pilot Scheme for developing a transnational credit system, but also as a controlled environment for finding solutions for the challenges that arose and for testing these solutions.

First of all, the first challenge was the paperwork. It started with the application form. The ERASMUS Bureau came up with a form, which proved to be rather unpractical to use, in particular in a fax machine. It triggered the History group and its coordinator to revise it completely, which – after some further modifications – was used from 1991 until the termination of the Pilot Scheme. It was no different for the course catalogue. The History Group presented the ‘ideal information package’, prepared again by its coordinator, which was based on an analysis of three successive editions and a merger of good practices for different items as included in the individual higher education brochures of the group. Its outline contained precise headings for four chapters and its sub-chapters. The chapters identified were, besides a general introduction to ECTS: a). information on the institution; b). information on the department/faculty; and c). course descriptions. The model was a response to the continuous criticisms regarding the quality, incompleteness and reliability of the existing information packages. The criticisms started with serious complaints expressed at the only student-evaluation meeting that was organised during the lifespan of the Pilot Scheme. The meeting took place in Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve on 29-30 October 1990, and was also attended by subject area

coordinators. In too many cases the Info-packs proved to contain out of date information about the educational offer.<sup>258</sup> The opinions of the 34 students who participated in the evaluation meeting were confirmed by an independent student survey of the first year. In the publication *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration: The View of the Students* (1992) it is concluded rather straightforwardly that the preparation at the home institution for the study period abroad was not very good in the first year of the ECTS Pilot Scheme. There was also severe criticism about the quality of information offered by host institutions. With some understatement the report stipulates that ‘Comments about the ECTS information packages were not necessarily enthusiastic with less than half of the students rating them useful for the choice of the host university and for the choices of courses’.<sup>259</sup>

This was a rather disturbing observation, because the Information Package was meant to be one of the core ECTS mechanisms, the main formal medium for communicating information about the host institution. The state of affairs, as expressed in the Coopers & Lybrand report, published in the first months of 1993, is more mixed. It states that ‘many of our interviewees commented that the standard and coverage of other institutions’ information packages had improved greatly since the first year of the pilot. Some staff interviewed suggested, however, that it was still common for information packages to be incomplete in that they did not cover the basic core content’.<sup>260</sup> It showed the initiative of the History Subject Area Group was timely. The model was input for a working group on credit allocation and information packages convened by the Commission of European Communities on 6 July 1993. Its aim: to improve the allocation of credits to course units and the quality of the information packages. Taking into account an analysis of all information packages, the existing model table, the proposal for ‘an ideal Information Package, submitted by Robert Wagenaar’ and various suggestions of the members of the working group as well as all subject area coordinators a new ‘model of table of content for an ECTS Information Package’ was agreed and distributed.<sup>261</sup> This model table would be kept in place until 2004 when a major revision of ECTS was agreed.

<sup>258</sup> Robert Wagenaar, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1990-1991 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. ERASMUS – European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Groningen, 1991, 3.

<sup>259</sup> Friedrich Maiworm, Wolfgang Steube and Ulrich Teichler, *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration: The View of the Students*. ERASMUS Monographs No.15. Werkstattberichte – Band 37. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1992, 14, 120.

<sup>260</sup> Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, *Evaluation of the pilot phase of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Final Report*. Brussels: Coopers & Lybrand, February 1993, paragraph 446.

<sup>261</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Guidelines for Information Packages, 1993*. Included in the *Final Report for the Academic Year 1992-1993 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. Groningen: University of Groningen, 1993.

It was again the History group that came up in the same year with another ‘paperwork’ innovation, the introduction of the ‘learning contract’, which would be re-named ‘Learning Agreement’. The term was introduced in a new information brochure published by the European Commission in 1994.<sup>262</sup> The Learning Agreement proved to be a key ECTS document, besides the Information Package and the Transcript of Records. In practice, it meant a revision of the application form which also contained an indicative overview of the selected course units a student planned to take. This approach did not satisfy. To assure *a priori* recognition for course units taken successfully a formal document was required to be signed by the two departmental coordinators and the student involved. The document should list the course units selected before arrival and included additional space to make adjustments to replace course units that proved (no longer) to be available, or because the student had changed his/her mind. The final list should match the Transcript of Records to be offered after the mobility period by the host institution. This transcript should only contain the units for which credits and a mark were awarded. Before the start of the mobility period and in addition to the application form the sending or home institution was also expected to prepare a Transcript of Records containing all successfully completed course units. The information on this Transcript was meant to ensure that the course units to be enrolled in the host institution were of the appropriate level. The data resulting from the first year showed that this was not superfluous. According to the student survey 31% of the course units taken was thought to be of a not sufficiently demanding level.<sup>263</sup>

It was stipulated – also to the wider world – that the Transcript of Records should be perceived as a legal document, a written proof for students and other stakeholders of successfully completed course units. Information included should be easily and generally understood, have a common format and be produced in one of the major European languages. The outcome of the ECTS Pilot Scheme discussions was that besides identifying the student (including matriculation date and number), it should include the name of the institution where the student was officially registered, and by definition should hold the name of the department issuing the transcript plus, as crucial information: course unit title, code, duration and workload, as well as the grade awarded. It should be possible at any time to relate this information to information included in the Information Package. Course unit load should according to the ECTS philosophy be related to student

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<sup>262</sup> Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS. ECTS Overdrachtsysteem van studiepunten van de Europese Gemeenschap*. Luxemburg: Bureau voor officiële publikaties der Europese Gemeenschappen, 1994, 7.

<sup>263</sup> Friedrich Maiworm, Wolfgang Steube and Ulrich Teichler, *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration*, 122.

workload (relative weight) and not to contact hours.<sup>264</sup> In practice, countries and universities basing their education on the Napoleonic model proved to have great difficulties to separate teaching hours from student workload. They ‘demanded’ a minimum number of ‘contact’ or teaching hours to make the Transcript a reliable basis for recognition. It was symbolic for the clashes of cultures the ECTS Pilot Scheme had to deal with.

## Content related challenges

This was only the paperwork. More critical were a number of highly fundamental principles to be decided. The first question to be answered was what the basis should be for awarding credit. At the very start of the Pilot it was agreed that credits could only be awarded for course work that had been assessed and passed successfully. From the perspective that credits should reflect student workload this was not self-evident. In Germany for example students were expected to take lecture courses (‘Vorlesungen’) which were not concluded with an examination, but were meant as a contribution to developing a scholarly attitude and to transfer knowledge and develop understanding. That was experienced as part of the learning process. This involved time and therefore workload, which could not be credited. The underlying principle of the ECTS Pilot Scheme, was that formal learning should always be measured.

Another issue was the allocation of credits to courses. As has been already mentioned, the notion of ‘relative value’ was introduced as one of the ECTS features. This has to be understood against the background that it was initially meant to be a ‘credit reference system’ for transfer and recognition purposes. The allocation of credits over a degree programme and its academic years seemed to be a simple exercise, but it proved to be much more complicated than initially expected. In a modularized system – such as that of the US – it looks rather simple: every unit has a fixed number of credits, 3 or a combination adding up to 3 (e.g. 1+2). This works well when a programme is feasible, which means that students are able to study according to schedule. In many countries this proved not really to be the case. The extreme was Italy. Although at the time the official length of the *Laurea* degree was four to six years depending on the subject area, it would take students up to twice as long – if they finished at all. The example of the subject area of History is illustrative. According to the formal programme students should take 21 modules and prepare a final thesis in four years. This implied taking 6 course units in one academic year, while in reality only 4 seemed

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<sup>264</sup> Robert Wagenaar, Transcripts. Session 1.07. European Association for International Cooperation. 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference ‘Europe and Beyond’. The Hague, 2-4 December 1993.

to be realistic in terms of student workload. The two Italian universities included in the Inner Circle, Bologna and Pisa, applied slightly different calculations. Incoming students were expected to take 4 course units in Pisa and 5 in Bologna to obtain 60 ECTS credits, while in both Bologna and Pisa 60 credits awarded by a host partner institution were recognized as the equivalence of 4 Italian course units.<sup>265</sup>

But there was more. It was debated whether complexity of a topic/ course unit should affect the number of credits to be awarded. As a core principle, it was decided that only student workload should be decisive. When developing the European credits for vocational education and training system (ECVET) around 2005 a different direction was taken, which as a result made ECTS and ECVET incompatible. See below for more detail. Furthermore, the decision was taken in ECTS that credits would not be linked to a particular level as in the US system (100, 200, 300 level etc. reflecting the successive year of the degree programme). This was thought not to be feasible in a European context with quite different educational traditions. It would also limit flexibility. Furthermore, it was observed that initially within departments the factor 'prestige' was brought into play as an element to allocate credits: a subject taught by a more prestigious member of staff, e.g. a senior full professor, should – according to this line of thinking – be awarded more credits although the actual student workload would not justify this. This kind of thinking would diminish over time, after more experience was built up. Finally, the working group on Credit Allocation and Information Packages observed at its meeting in 1993 that there were still institutions that related workload only to teaching hours, not taking independent work into account. It also noted that not in all cases the distribution of credits for each academic year added up to 60 a year and/or 30 per semester.<sup>266</sup>

The wide variations in the organization of the academic year between the different member states was another factor to cope with. Not only the length of the academic year differed, but also the start and end dates. The actual start of courses varied between the beginning of September and the end of November. As other overarching challenges, – independent of the academic field- were identified the digitalization of information, language preparation and grade transfer. At the fifth General ECTS meeting which took place in the autumn of 1992 workshops were organized to stress the importance of these themes. With five years of ERASMUS mobility and 3 years of ECTS experience in mind, the importance of language skills in international mobility was confirmed. However,

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<sup>265</sup> Robert Wagenaar, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1993-1994 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. ERASMUS – European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Groningen, 1994. In this report the Minutes of the Autumn Meeting of the Subject Area Group of History, Alcalá de Henares, 4 November 1993, 7.

<sup>266</sup> Ibidem.

the importance given to language preparation and language learning in general differed from one institution to another, ranging from pure addendum to fully integrated in the study programme. A difference was made between ‘survival competence’, which would require 200 contact hours to prepare for a new language, and ‘study competence’, which would ask for much more.<sup>267</sup> Clear indicators about language proficiency were lacking at the time, because the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* of the Council of Europe had not yet been developed. First steps were made from 1991 onward, but the system became only operational a decade later.<sup>268</sup>

Also the transfer, recognition and conversion of grades – besides the transfer and recognition of credits – proved to be a highly challenging issue. In the second edition of the ECTS Users’ Guide (1990) an ECTS grading scale was introduced, which intended to offer transparency regarding the performance of student in comparative perspective. Seemingly, it was inspired by the German model, running from 1 to 4, each number reflecting one quarter in decreasing performance: 1 being the top 25 % of successful students.<sup>269</sup> The scale did not satisfy the users. Therefore, the European Commission took the initiative to establish a special working group. The group met twice before a proposal, prepared by Richard Whewell of Strathclyde University, Glasgow, could be presented at the fourth ECTS General Plenary Meeting in November 1991. The proposal, which was received well, was an obvious compromise, combining the best of two worlds, in practice two completely different philosophies. It combined numerical definitions with qualitative expressions underpinned by definitions. The new ECTS grading scale presented as a facilitating scale was based on five ECTS pass grades and two fail grades, ranging from A (best 10% of successful students), B (next 25%), C (next 30%), D (next 25%) and E (next 10%). The letters were linked to the qualifications excellent, very good, good, satisfactory and sufficient, following in practice the Dutch model.<sup>270</sup> Although, it seemed to be a sophisticated system, practice would show in the following years that higher education institutions were not able or motivated to underpin

<sup>267</sup> Erasmus Bureau, ERASMUS. European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. Fifth Plenary Meeting. Institut National Politechnique de Toulouse 25-27 October 1992. Minutes. (ERAB/93/ECTS/Plenary Meeting/25-27 Oct 92/Minutes).

<sup>268</sup> Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Retrieved from: [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf)

<sup>269</sup> Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS. ECTS Overdrachtsysteem van studiepunten van de Europese Gemeenschap*. Tweede editie. Luxemburg: Bureau voor officiële publikaties der Europese Gemeenschappen, 1990, 22-23.

<sup>270</sup> Transfer of Grades between institutions in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell on behalf of the ECTS working group of grade conversion, 1992. R. Wagenaar represented the SACs in the working group.

the qualifications with statistical data reflecting the grading curve or distribution of successful students.

Besides these general challenges – which are reflected in the ECTS key features defining the core of the system – there were also subject specific issues, in particular emerging in Business Administration and History, due to the wide variety of topics covered, but also related to the different structures of the degree programmes involved. Of the two, History had to face most challenges – or they were documented best. From the very start the subject area group of History faced two major issues: the position of the final thesis and the position of minor subjects/subsidiary courses in the ECTS Pilot Scheme. After years of debate in the many subject area group meetings, it was decided in 1993 to set up a special working group to come up with clear proposals and feasible solutions. Given the fact that both topics had and continue to have a much wider connotation than one subject area, it seems useful to offer some insight into the issues at stake and the solutions found.

The key question discussed was whether thesis work could be part of a mobility period. And, if so, how then should the responsibility for supervision and assessment be organized? It was established that the thesis was the most important examination in most degree programmes in the subject area of History. However, in Spain it was part of post-graduate studies preparing for a PhD and in the UK and Ireland – having the bachelor-master structure – limited as a mandatory element to the MA. In Flanders-Belgium, its preparation was spread over two years. The student workload proved to differ in Europa between 4 months and 6 month of study, that is 20 to 40 ECTS credits. In some cases, it took students ten months to prepare and complete their thesis. It was also noted that the level of required scholarship differed between countries and institutions. Nevertheless, the working group was able to formulate common indicators. It was agreed that each student before graduation should be able “to write, quite independently, a scholarly work of substantial length within a given period of time”. The dissertation or final thesis should be characterized by: four elements: 1. The interpretation of source material, which enables the historian to see more than the layman by using – depending on the topic – primary and/or secondary sources; 2. Contextualizing of information, a clear definition of the problem covered, good knowledge of relevant literature and familiarity with existing theories; 3. Transmission of the views obtained in lucid and unambiguous language; and 4. The possibility to test the thesis by means of the critical apparatus. In other words, the purpose of the final thesis was executing scholarly research under supervision.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Report on the Position of the Final Thesis in the ECTS Pilot Programme. European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Subject Area: History. Ref. no. 058a.93/ECTS, dd. October 1993/ R. Wagenaar, SAC for History..

It was concluded – as a principle – that the preparation of the final thesis was allowed in the framework of a student mobility programme. Therefore, this option should be included in the Information Package. Although flexibility in facilitating the preparation of the final thesis was highlighted, also a set of basic rules were formulated which would meet the wider ECTS rules. This implied that it had to be explicitly included in the Learning Agreement. It should only be allowed when the Learning Agreement also contained regular lecture and/or seminar courses to be completed successfully. Seven basic rules were defined of which the most important were that thesis writing is carried out according to the rules of the host institution and the number of ECTS credits is according to the number included in the degree programme of that host institution. Furthermore, it was stated that supervision was the prime responsibility of the host institution, but co-supervision of home and host was an option. As a consequence a successful completed thesis should be recognized by the home institution as part of its degree programme. It was also mentioned that the language requirements of the host institution should be respected.<sup>272</sup> The set of rules, including arrangement for re-sits, developed in the context of the Pilot as an ‘educational action research’ project, are still valid today.

As difficult to solve by the Subject Area Group proved to be the issue of minor subjects and subsidiary course units. It was established that all History programmes had a mandatory part to be spent on non-history course work. However, the time reserved in the curricula for either minor studies or subsidiary course units varied from 12 to 50%. This implied that limiting the student exchange period to History courses meant a real obstacle for organizing a useful study programme abroad. It has to be taken into account that the mobility period of the vast majority of students in the ECTS Pilot Scheme was 10 months, a full academic year. Nowadays, after higher education institutions introduced the semester structure to facilitate large-scale mobility, most students spend only five month abroad. The main argument in the report of the working group for including non-History courses was ‘to improve the general knowledge of students and to maximize the chances to find a position on the labour market’. During the first four years of the Pilot the approach of the institutions had been quite different, ranging from taking non-History courses as normal practice to not allowing it at all. The working group suggested a ‘very lenient approach’. This had far reaching consequences because it meant that also ECTS credits had to be allocated to minor programmes and subsidiary courses in a systematic way which implied making other departments (not involved in the Pilot) acquainted with the ECTS ‘mechanisms’.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>273</sup> Report on the Position of the Minor Subjects/Subsidiary courses in the ECTS Pilot Scheme. Ref.no. 063a93/ECTS, d.d. October 1993/R. Wagenaar, SAC for History..



Also in this case the working group defined additional rules to be respected, such as the inclusion in the Information Package of a statement that minor subjects/ subsidiary course units could be taken, plus a list of available course units of this type. The Information Package should also contain a description of the position and size of non-History course units in the curriculum. The limit of these course units was set at a maximum of 50% and they should be made explicit in the Learning Agreement. The report was very much welcomed by the Subject Area Group.<sup>274</sup> It is no coincidence that two universities participating in the subject area of History, Deusto Bilbao and St. Andrews, took the lead in finding a more robust solution by publishing an Information Package for their complete institution. This implied allocating ECTS credits to all course units. This initiative took the European Commission by surprise. The first edition of their Institution-wide Information Package was published for the academic year 1994-1995. The University of Pisa, also a member of the History group, followed one year later. It proved inspirational for other institutions. How different is the situation today, when universities have even defined a policy where recognition of course work taken abroad is limited to electives and minors.

The examples of subject related issues, although being crucial for implementing the Pilot Scheme at subject area level, must be seen as ancillary arrangements. That is agreements made among the partner institutions themselves, during and after the pilot phase, in order to smoothen mobility and facilitate recognition in a given, subject specific context. Such ancillary arrangements are not part of the ECTS credit system *sensu stricto*. The solution described above, with maximums for minor subjects/ subsidiary courses, is an example of such an ancillary arrangement. Very useful and sensible, a good practice, potentially even transferable to other partnerships in other subject areas and contexts, but *not* a key feature of ECTS.

In the years to come, the mistake was often made not to make a distinction between ECTS as a credit system and the, highly valuable, ancillary arrangements. It would lay at the basis of many unnecessary debates on the functioning of ECTS and has even led to the establishment of a parallel and superfluous credit system for vocational education and training, European Credits for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which is discussed in chapter 4, *Making the Jump. From a European credit transfer system towards a credit accumulation system*.

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<sup>274</sup> European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). History Network 1989-1995. Minutes of the Autumn Meeting of the Subject Area Group of History. Alcalá de Henares, 5 November 1993.

## Extension of the Pilot Scheme

When the reports of the History group on the final thesis and minor subject/subsidiary course units were prepared and accepted, the ECTS Pilot Scheme had already entered into a new phase, both in terms of the numbers of institutions involved and its mobility arrangements. In 1991 the Commission felt it was necessary to widen the basis for testing the functioning of the credit mechanisms by involving more institutions. In two steps (September 1991 and March 1992) the Inner Circle was extended with more European Communities universities and by involving universities from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) from 84 to 122 to 145 members. For the first step – the extension of the European Community countries – 120 applications were received. Based on an application procedure again, the selection was made by the coordinating team, with an important say of the five subject area coordinators. The new institutions were spread over the five subject areas, their number growing from 17 to 29 on average. While the old Inner Circle institutions continued to receive a grant of 10.000 ECU in 1992 to fund the additional activities, the starting grant for the newly admitted institutions was set at 15.000 ECU. The number of full student grants allocated to each institution was increased from five to ten with the aim ‘of stimulating new flows and interactions within ECTS’. At the same time, the level of the grant was equalled to the grants awarded by the National Agencies (NGAA) to regular ERASMUS mobility students.<sup>275</sup>

The first meeting for the newly admitted universities (36 plus two higher education institutions from the five New Länder of Germany) was the Fourth Plenary, which took place in Thessaloniki (30 November – 3 December 1991). For the EFTA universities the Fifth Plenary Meeting in Toulouse (24-28 October 1992), would be their only opportunity to see all five Subject Area Groups operating in conjunction. However, two representatives from each EFTA country already attended the Thessaloniki meeting as observers. While the Thessaloniki meeting focused mostly on administrative aspects, improving mobility arrangements and the transfer of grades, and again taking place in a positive atmosphere, the Toulouse meeting was much more political, and the mood was accordingly. The Commission took much time to explain its policies and the rest of the first day was devoted to the future of ECTS. This came at a moment that the number of Inner Circle institutions had grown with nearly 60%. Although not an objective in itself, the number of mobilities had grown gradually during the Pilot phase:

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<sup>275</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991. ERASMUS Programme*. SEC (92) 796 final. Brussels, 30 June 1992, 21-22; Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1992. ERASMUS Programme*. COM(93) 268 final. Brussels, 25 June 1993, 18.

1989 – 1990: 553  
 1990 – 1991: 810  
 1991 – 1992: 928  
 1992 – 1993: 1700  
 1993 – 1994: 1850  
 1994 – 1995: 2054

This meant a growth from 6.6 students on average in the first academic year to 14.2 on average per institution in the final year, with the number of student grants doubling in 1992-1993.<sup>276</sup>

In the 1991 Annual Report on the ERASMUS Programme the Commission correctly stated that ‘language remains the most influential criterion on selection of the students: the United Kingdom and France remain the most attractive countries. However, the widespread endeavour within the ECTS Pilot Scheme to achieve more balanced student flows can be clearly observed’. This observation was underpinned with a table showing the student flows in the academic year 1990-1991. It also shows that countries with less-spoken languages (DK, GR, NL., PT) attracted fewer students. Those countries sent on average twice as many students than they were able to receive. The table concerning the academic year 1991-1992 offers a comparable picture.<sup>277</sup> This situation could not come as a surprise, but it nevertheless motivated the Commission to take a stand. At the end of the second day of the Toulouse Plenary after Commission senior staff, Domenico Lenarduzzi (Head of the Division responsible for the ERASMUS programme) and Angelika Verli-Wallace (Head of Unit responsible for ECTS) had returned to Brussels, an unexpected announcement was made. Policy officer Peter van der Hijden, who had joined the Commission ECTS unit a year earlier, was entrusted to inform the institutions that the Commission – not satisfied with the regional diversification – had decided to condition the institutional grant and the number of student mobility grants. Student grants (50/50%) and institutional grants (70%/30%) would be related to a wider distribution of student flows, especially to and from member countries with less-spoken languages. ECTS Inner

<sup>276</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report ERASMUS Programme 1990/91* (SEC (91) 902 final), Brussels, 22 May 1991, 12; Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991 ERASMUS Programme* (SEC (92) 796 final), Brussels, 30 June 1992, 21; Commission of the European Communities, *Report from the Commission. ERASMUS Programme 1992. Annual Report* (COM (93) 268 final), Brussels, 25 June 1993, 19, table XIII in annex; Commission of the European Communities, *Report from the Commission. ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1993* ((COM (94) 281 final). Brussels, 06-07.1994, 15; Commission of the European Communities, *ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1994* (COM (95) 416 final), Brussels, 08.09.1995, 10.

<sup>277</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991. ERASMUS Programme* (SEC (92) 796 final), Brussels, 30 June 1992, 22.

Circle institutions would obtain more detailed information in December 1992.<sup>278</sup>

This announcement came as a complete surprise also to the five Subject Area Coordinators. As a result the mood at the meeting was blackened, because what was intended as an ‘incentive’ was perceived as ‘punishment’ or even ‘blackmail’. Besides severe protests at the meeting, tough letters were sent to the Commission by individual and combinations of universities. Universities even threatened to withdraw from the Scheme. At the next coordinating meeting of Commission, ERASMUS Bureau and the Subject Area Coordinators, which took place in Brussels on 8-9 December 1992. the conclusion had to be drawn that the Commission had not done itself a service, and had lost trust, confidence and prestige among the participating institutions – institutions it depended on to make ECTS a success. In a circular letter dated 13 January 1993 a more careful approach was chosen.<sup>279</sup> Until the end of the Pilot Scheme the coordinating team and Subject Area Groups continued to have their regular bi-annual meetings, but no ECTS Plenary was ever organized again. This judgmental error of the Commission in using inappropriate pressure, however, did not change the general opinion of all involved higher education institutions that the ECTS Pilot Scheme had been a tremendous success. Overall, the ‘educational active research’ approach had paid off.

### From Pilot to main stream

Already half way the Pilot Scheme preparations were initiated regarding the scaling of ECTS. At the fifth and final Plenary Meeting, held in October 1992, the five subject area groups were invited to discuss the paper ‘Options for the future development of ECTS: generalization scenario’s’. The Commission offered two possible options: discipline-based networks and institution-based networks, but stressed it was open to any other proposals or alternatives. The responses of the five groups were mixed about the feasibility of further extension, although already after three academic years, in general, ECTS was thought to be sufficiently defined to make a next step. However, it was stressed that ‘although the system itself is mature enough, its generalization needs to be guided and supported in order to maintain the dynamism achieved until now and in order to maintain its unique character of being one commonly understood system applicable across

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<sup>278</sup> ERASMUS Bureau, Fifth ECTS Plenary Meeting. Minutes. European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse, 25-27 October 1992 (ERAB/93/ECTS/Plenary Meeting/25-27 Oct 92/Minutes), 15.

<sup>279</sup> Robert Wagenaar, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1992-1993 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. Groningen, 1993.

various types of mobility'. Therefore it was thought that generalisation of the process required a gradual approach, supported by an 'intense and authoritative information campaign' in which the departments involved in the Pilot Scheme should play a substantial part. The suggestion in the paper that an Advisory Service would be required to 'control' consistent implementation was broadly supported. In addition, it was suggested to set up national support services and a database and electronic communications network to fulfil information and communication needs of the generalized scheme.<sup>280</sup>

This was according to the findings of the independent evaluation executed by the consulting firm Coopers & Lybrand commissioned by the European Commission, in which the opinions of the five Subject Area Groups were central, in particular in the chapter focusing on extending the use of ECTS. In addition, the report is based on a review of materials, including institutions annual reports as well as on face-to-face interviews of staff of 39 Inner Circle departments, the five subject area coordinators and – as a reference – interviews with 12 non-inner circle (outer circle and other) institutions. The report makes a distinction between fundamental principles and key mechanisms. As basic principle mutual trust is defined based on (1) transparency of curricula and academic procedures, (2) prior agreement between home and host institution on the course units to be confirmed and recognized and (3) the use of credit points to indicate the volume of learning. As key mechanisms it identified the credit system and the information package. The purpose of the evaluation was threefold: to assess the extent to which ECTS had achieved its aims in the pilot phase and – as it was at the time defined – would achieve these aims if generalized. And thirdly, 'to identify implications for extending the use of ECTS, including any changes to, or developments of the current system which would be necessary or desirable'.<sup>281</sup>

In the final report published in February 1993 (a draft version was discussed by the coordinating team in December 1992), the 'overall conclusion is that in the context of the pilot phase, ECTS has proved an effective means of facilitating academic recognition between higher education institutions in different European countries. Most of the institutions in the pilot were able to implement the ECTS key mechanisms (the credit point system and the information package) reasonably successfully ...'. Regarding the wider use of ECTS, the firm concludes 'that ECTS could be used more widely; and that no changes to the basic elements of the system (transparency, agreement in advance and the credit point system)

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<sup>280</sup> ERASMUS Bureau, Fifth ECTS Plenary Meeting. Minutes. European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse, 25-27 October 1992 (ERAB/93/ECTS/Plenary Meeting/25-27 Oct 92/Minutes), 25-52.

<sup>281</sup> Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, *Evaluation of the pilot phase of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Final Report*. Brussels: Coopers & Lybrand, February 1993, 11, Executive Summary, section 10..

would be needed to facilitate its wider use'.<sup>282</sup> However, it also concluded that wider use would require more than just supplying information on the scheme. It suggested a more pro-active strategy explicitly showing the advantages of using ECTS for student mobility, underpinned by start-up funding for institutions to implement ECTS. Key questions raised in the report were (1) whether initial funding should be applied for supporting new partnerships or existing bilateral and multilateral ones and (2) whether the focus should be on the adoption of ECTS by individual departments or complete institutions. The authors of the report thought it more realistic to put the emphasis on individual departments because commitment was seen as a crucial pre-requisite for successful implementation. From these two questions a third derived: should funding be provided to individual institutions or to networks or departments? The former was suggested, because it was thought to also allow for preserving the benefits of the network approach. According to Coopers & Lybrand financial support should be limited to the start-up phase. It did not advise on the level of funding. It suggested to the Commission to investigate the feasibility to 'copyright' ECTS, to 'prevent bogus or dubious institutions using the ECTS name'. Advice about ECTS should be dealt with by the ERASMUS Bureau, for academic judgment it was advised to contact a pilot institution in the same or related subject area and/or country/region.

The Commission did indeed give the report and its own paper 'Options for the future development of ECTS: generalization scenario's', a follow-up. It chose a step-by-step approach which it thought would guarantee most success. In the first half of 1994 it launched a call for 'proposing projects for the extension of the use of ECTS both within their own establishment' (higher education institutions) (by introducing ECTS in other subject areas) and within their cooperation partnerships, particular in the ICPs. According to the Commission, institutions responded 'enthusiastically'. With the support of an ad hoc working group of academics, the Commission assessed the proposals for funding at a meeting on 11-12 July 1994. An average amount of 13.000 ECU was made available to 143 institutions, using in practice the amount that had been reserved for the Pilot Phase in the previous years. The Commission expressed the intention to monitor this extension closely.<sup>283</sup>

For this purpose a pilot project on 'Quality Enhancement' was set up by the Commission in conjunction with the University of Strathclyde and together with a small group of ECTS experts for the period 1995/96.<sup>284</sup> During that

<sup>282</sup> Ibidem, paragraph 17, 18 and 801-849..

<sup>283</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1994*. COM(95)416 final. Brussels, 8 September 1995, 10.

<sup>284</sup> The group consisted of the following members: Julia González (ES), Bertil Holmberg (SE), Michel Jouve (FR), Robert Wagenaar (NL), Richard Whewell (UK) and Suzanne Cyprès (BE). List of Counsellors Quality Enhancement in ECTS.

period 21 site visits were made by pairs of experts. The project was coordinated by Richard Whewell and Suzanne Cyrès, the latter having extensive administrative experience in ECTS matters. She worked on ECTS at the ERASMUS Bureau from 1990, replacing in practice Mary O'Mahony, until its closedown in 1995. The purpose of the project was threefold: to verify the quality of implementation, measure the extent of problems associated with its implementation and the identification of good practices in finding solutions for any problems. The visits were highly appreciated by the universities involved.<sup>285</sup>

As part of the dissemination strategy in May 1995 a new ECTS Users' Guide was published by the European Commission and prepared by the ERASMUS Bureau as one of its last activities. The opportunity was used to simplify the name from European Community Course Credit System to *European Credit Transfer System* and, as a result, doing better justice to its acronym ECTS. The format was an A4-binder which also included the 'Directory of ECTS Users and their direct partners'. Although the format was not very practical, the examples of the detailed explanation of the Information Package and the different forms were, such as the Application Form, the Learning Agreement and the Transcript of Records in English, French and German. The Guide was printed in all European Communities languages.<sup>286</sup> Three years later a more user-friendly edition was published.

From the academic year 1996-1997 the focus would be on non-pilot scheme institutions for further extension. In a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> round another 74 higher education institutions were selected for a Development grant, 38 universities and 36 'non-university institutions'. The growing interest for applying ECTS as a recognition tool for academic studies can be digested from the applications for SOCRATES Institutional Contracts. The wider SOCRATES programme, which ran from 1995-1999, had become the 'new roof' of the ERASMUS programme. 772 new higher education institutions applied for a grant in their ERASMUS application for 1997-1998. One year later another 290 institutions did. They had reason to do so, because the application of ECTS was made conditional for obtaining mobility funding. With the outcomes of the pilot project 'Quality Enhancement' in hand, Richard Whewell proposed to the Commission to establish a wider and sustainable 'Quality Appraisal in ECTS' project which should be a combination of self-appraisal and site visits by ECTS counsellors. For this purpose fifty institutions were selected for a visit, which in practice was 25% of those

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<sup>285</sup> Note "European Credit Transfer System. Quality Appraisal in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell, June 1997..

<sup>286</sup> European Commission DG XXII 'Education, Training, Youth, *European Credit Transfer System. ECTS Users' Guide*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1995.

who had obtained a Development grant, and were not visited as part of the pilot. It involved a Community budget of 300.000 ECU.<sup>287</sup>

Those selected were officially informed by a letter dated 13 May 1997 from Domenico Lenarduzzi, director of Directorate A – Action in the field of education, implementation of SOCRATES. The letter offers insight into the thinking and strategy of the Commission. The Commission proved to be positively surprised by the number of responses, but it was also concerned about the integrity of the system. As a response, the letter announced a double policy: the organization of training seminars for those institutions selected to begin using ECTS that year and to send ECTS counsellors to those already participating in ECTS. The aim of the visit was defined as ‘to identify “reference” institutions in each country that will serve as examples for newcomers and collect examples of good practice’. It was also stated that these counsellors could help to resolve practical problems and ‘to promote ECTS in those departments still reticent to using it’. The Commission made it quite clear that it intended to protect the brand name ECTS by avoiding ‘the danger of a well-meaning but uninformed, inadequate, partial or even cavalier implementation of ECTS principles or mechanisms, which would create confusion and destroy the benefits of treating problems of academic recognition on a consistent, transparent basis with the use of commonly understood criteria’. The Commission would compensate the institutions financially for the site visit.<sup>288</sup>

The visits required an expansion of the group of counsellors from six to twelve.<sup>289</sup> Besides the group of international counsellors, also national advisers were appointed in 1998, thus forming the ECTS Helpline network. Its members took care of organizing a large number of ECTS workshops. From 1998 the international group of counsellors would gradually expand further. In 1999 the group grew to 32 members, and was doubled one year later. In July 2000 the 64 members represented every EU country and all but one candidate countries.<sup>290</sup> In the academic year 1998-1999 another 50 site visits were organized and in the academic year 1999-2000 a 100 visits were made. For the visits an ‘ECTS Self-eval-

<sup>287</sup> Note “European Credit Transfer System. Quality Appraisal in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell, June 1997; European Commission, Selection Criteria for Establishments to be Visited in 1997/98 by ECTS Experts; Raimonda Markevicičienė and Alfred Račkauskas, *ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. History, Implementation. Problems*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2012, 4.

<sup>288</sup> European Commission, Letter to the Rectors and Heads of institutions that will receive a visit of ECTS counsellors in 1997/9-1998. Brussels, 13 May 1997.

<sup>289</sup> Members of the counsellors group 1997-98: Richard Whewell, Volker Gehmlich, Poul Bonde, Julia González Ferreras, Michel Jouve, Reinhard Schmidt, Robert Wagenaar, Estela Pereira, Bertil Holmberg, Esko Koponen, Carolyn Campbell, and Suzanne Cyprès. Invitation for counsellors meeting, Brussels, 7 July 1997..

<sup>290</sup> ECTS Counsellors – Address list, July 2000..



uation Questionnaire' was developed that made a distinction between the institutional and the departmental perspective. For reasons of consistency, also a 'questionnaire for use on ECTS appraisal visits' was defined, to be used by the counsellors during the site visit. It covered the topics Information Package, institutional commitment and the student experience: application process, advice to students, the Learning Agreement, results for incoming students, results for outgoing students.<sup>291</sup>

Although the activities look impressive, both in terms of the number of ECTS experts involved and the number of institutions that opted for ECTS implementation, the mood at the annual meetings of the international group of counsellors was not very positive.<sup>292</sup> On the basis of the visits, the counsellors analysed that real penetration of the system and its philosophy at the level of the academic staff, was not taking place. ECTS remained mainly a reference system for student mobility handled by the International Offices of the HE institutions involved, as part of the Institutional Contract with the European Commission. As Raimonda Markevičiene and Alfred Račkauskas stated in their paper on ECTS in 2012: 'by 1999 the ECTS was dying from lack of support on national and institutional levels as well as suffocating from narrow minded approaches to problems and impacts student mobility brings to institutions'.<sup>293</sup> This judgment might be too negative, in general it expresses the concerns well. Anyway, the situation necessitated the Commission to set up the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. For this purpose it established a steering group on 24 February 1999 involving 19 representatives from university associations and networks, European employer organisations, National Agencies, Ministries of Education and the group of international ECTS counsellors and the European Commission. Its report prepared by the academics Volker Gehmlich (Fachhochschule Osnabrück) as chair and Stephen Adam (University of Westminster) as rapporteur, was published one year later in January 2000.<sup>294</sup>

<sup>291</sup> Overview of institutions to be visited '98/'99; Overview of institutions to be visited 1999-2000. Questionnaire for use on ECTS Appraisal Visits; ECTS Self-Evaluation Questionnaire. All documents stored in Tuning Archive.

<sup>292</sup> The following international counsellors meetings took place during the period 1997-2000: Brussels, 7 July 1997 (installing group); Florence, 16-17 October 1998, Aveiro, 9-10 July 1999 and Bilbao, 7-8 July 2000.

<sup>293</sup> Raimonda Markevičiene and Alfred Račkauskas, *ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. History, Implementation. Problems*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2012, 5.

<sup>294</sup> *Report for the European Commission. ECTS Extension Feasibility Project*. January 2000, Retrieved on 3 June 2018 from: [https://media.ehea.info/file/BFUG\\_Seminar/96/8/ECTS\\_ext\\_feasibility\\_553968.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/BFUG_Seminar/96/8/ECTS_ext_feasibility_553968.pdf). Full report including appendixes to be found on EUCEN Observatory for Lifelong Learning (LLL) website: <http://lifelonglearning-observatory.eucen.eu/ectsexftp>. Retrieved on 3 June 2018. The membership of the Steering Group/Working Party is included in appendix 1, 27-28: <http://lifelonglearning-observatory.eucen.eu/sites/default/files/files/ann1ects.pdf>.

The main task of the steering group was to see how ECTS principles and approaches might facilitate the development of European lifelong learning. In the terms of reference four topics were identified:

- Describing the ‘state of the art’ of ECTS by focusing on results, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for development
- Offering an overview of the legal situation regarding the recognition, training and professional achievement within the EU member states;
- Identifying the opportunities and barriers for developing an integrative common European credit framework derived from ECTS to facilitate credit accumulation in higher education, post-school adult and vocational education, different modes of education and professional education; and finally
- Design a pilot project to test the feasibility of developing ECTS as a system that compasses education, vocational training, and professional development and as a result promotes lifelong learning.<sup>295</sup>

This proved to be a rather ambitious assignment. The core of the report is a description of the state of affairs in the membership countries. Although the report claims that it offers a summary of the current position of lifelong learning as described in country reports, in practice it limits itself to ECTS. This is no wonder because – as is correctly stated – there is no agreement yet what constitutes lifelong learning and the ‘development of integrated national systems for lifelong learning are in their infancy in Europe’. Notwithstanding this, the ambition expressed in the Bologna Declaration (adopted only a few months after the steering group has started its activities) is that ‘Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, providing they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned’. The authors of the report observe that there is an insufficient basis for incorporating vocational education and training in ECTS, due to differences in character between higher education and vocational education and training. These might be bridged in the future by focusing more on the outcomes of the learning process but these are hopes for the future. Interesting is also the notion of the main concern expressed in country reports, that is the misconception that ‘the introduction of credit accumulation creates an *‘a la carte’* framework in which the student has complete freedom to mix credits/units (different types and levels of education) at will, and then demands a recognized qualification’.<sup>296</sup>

Another relevant observation in this context is that ECTS is workload-based and has to deal with differences in ‘notional time’ in awarding credits. It is stip-

<sup>295</sup> Ibidem, Appendix 2 Project Terms of Reference, 30. Retrieved from: <http://lifelonglearning-observatory.eucen.eu/sites/default/files/files/ann2ects.pdf>

<sup>296</sup> Idem, Quotes on page 6.

ulated that 'one year of study' involves considerable variations between countries. More sophisticated measures are thought necessary. It is also noted that the 'current ECTS quantitative measure of credits needs to be supplemented by a more qualitative measure that emphasizes level, competencies and taught outcomes'. In this respect the report states that 'there was no agreement concerning the notion of levels within specific types of educational programmes. Some recommended the development of agreed European levels, whilst others rejected it'. The wish was expressed that European agreement about levels would emerge. It referred in this context to initiatives taken in the UK where there is the 'pioneering investigation and development of levels linked to outcomes: national generic (level) subject descriptors and national benchmark standards'. In the conclusion it is stated that a 'competencies-based approach to credits should be explored and tested to supplement the existing ECTS student workload-based approach'. A definition thought 'necessary for lifelong learning where learning is primarily based on the acquisition of skills and competencies'. According to the authors the 'current situation is that ECTS is an important but often peripheral activity of higher education institutions. The extension of ECTS to lifelong learning would require institutions to locate centrally the responsibility for co-ordinating their systems. It would become a core activity of many institutions'.<sup>297</sup> These very important observations and suggestions did not receive a follow-up in the report.

Therefore, the two and half page long press release of the European Commission could not hide that the conclusions and recommendations were somewhat disappointing in terms of making next steps. The main strategy put forward was to develop a more comprehensive European credit-based system for lifelong learning by supporting a number of identified national pilot projects.<sup>298</sup> The problem here was its wide variation ranging from extension of ECTS in a particular field to accreditation related issues (including prior learning), work-based learning, science-based further education, to accumulation and a lifelong learning framework. In other words the steering group had not been able to find sufficient common ground for a well-defined single pilot project able to extend ECTS to a system covering both higher education and vocational education and training in a lifelong learning context.

What is most striking in both the report and the press release is that a lifelong learning framework and an over-arching European credit accumulation and transfer framework – evidently not being the same – are not clearly distinguished. In the report it is stated that 'resulting diversity of (national) sys-

<sup>297</sup> *Idem*, 16-17, 21-22.

<sup>298</sup> European Commission, Press release ERASMUS. ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. Retrieved on 31 July 2000 from <http://europe.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/ectsext.html>. A printed version of this text stored in Tuning Archive.

tems leads to the conclusion that (the latter) is needed now more than ever'. It is stressed that ECTS is currently designed as a system to facilitate credit transfer, while a credit accumulation system requires that the students' entire educational programme is expressed in terms of credits, in which levels, progression and the academic coherence are more significant. The message is that it requires an evolution of ECTS tools and procedures, which implies further development of its features and principles. It is therefore remarkable that in the press release it is stated outright that 'ECTS can easily be applied as an accumulation system but this will require appropriate support and guidance'. A conclusion that could not be found in the report. Instead, the report concludes that the 'development and introduction of an ECTS credit-based lifelong learning framework will be a complex process'. It did not prevent the Commission to stipulate in the press release that the 'creation of an effective pan-European credit-based framework for lifelong learning would benefit all European citizens'. Since 2008 there is the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, initiated by the European Commission and founded on a Recommendation of the European Parliament, but it is not credit based. It shows that the political wish as expressed in the aim of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project was completely unrealistic.

Alongside the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project another project was initiated in 1999 which focused more in content on the implementation of ECTS, and in particular on the information aspect of it. The Commission went along with a proposal of Peter Blok of the University of Amsterdam to evaluate the quality of the ECTS Information Package as one of its key features. 900 eligible institutions were identified to have their Information Package evaluated by the national counsellors. For this purpose a 'Checklist for the analysis of the ECTS Information Packages' was defined covering 20 items organized in two blocks: 'General Information about the institution and department' and 'Information about the curriculum and the course unit description'. An Information Package understood as a course catalogue could and should be seen as a core element in a credit accumulation system.<sup>299</sup>

It is therefore not by accident that Peter Blok and Stephen Adam in 1999 prepared a short paper for the *EAIE Forum* publication entitled 'ECTS: from credit transfer to credit accumulation – a challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century'.<sup>300</sup> They advocated an 'evolution of ECTS into an overarching European credit framework', which was fully in line with the ambitions of the Bologna Declaration. Fritz Dalichow, who had left the ERASMUS Bureau in 1993 for the

<sup>299</sup> Annual meeting ECTS Counsellors, Draft agenda, Aveiro, 9-10 July 1999. Invitation letter to participate as evaluator in project on Info Packs, prepared by Peter Blok.

<sup>300</sup> Stephen Adam and Peter Blok, ECTS: from credit transfer to credit accumulation – a challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in: *EAIE Forum*. Vol. 1. No. 3, Autumn 1999, 8-9.

University of Derby, contributed to the same publication with the paper 'CATS and EUROCATS'. He suggested to integrate elements of the recent UK Credit Accumulation and Transfer System into a European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. This system should encompass all post-secondary education including continuing education and lifelong learning. As a key feature certification and crediting was foreseen per programme year. He pleaded for a 'ladder of awards', after obtaining 60 ECTS credits the Certificate, after 120 ECTS the Diploma, after 180 ECTS the Bachelor, after 240 ECTS the Higher Diploma and Master after having obtained 300 ECTS. His proposal was current; it was student-centred, needs-oriented and flexible. In his own wording: 'What is needed is EUROCATS. Let us look at it from the most important, the client's position, from the direction of 'student empowerment'. A student must be able to study at any time of his/her life at any place in Europe at any rate of study (full time, part time, present, distant, continuous, discontinuous) with efficient and transparent credit accumulation and full credit transfer/academic recognition whenever, wherever needed. EUROCATS would be able to fulfil these needs'. Although it contains interesting elements, which will return in later discussions, his paper did not get a follow-up.<sup>301</sup>

It had become obvious, that something else was required to position ECTS as the European credit system. A first step was a list of 19 'Questions and Answers' prepared by Stephen Adam in May 2000 as part of 'The ECTS Extension', that is the spread of ECTS principles and practices to all programmes offered by higher education institutions and adopted by the team of ECTS counsellors. These were published in 2001 by the European Commission.<sup>302</sup> The focus is on ECTS for accumulation. The question 'Is it possible to use ECTS for accumulation?' is answered by stating that 'in actual fact, transfer implies accumulation' when applied to all study programmes. The argument is made that the 'EC(T)S' accumulation system will increase transparency, improve recognition, result in increased employability, flexibility, mobility, making a qualification more portable and mobile, facilitate collaboration and will contribute to the convergence of 'educational structures' as agreed in the Bologna Declaration. In lifelong learning terms it will offer a framework for recording and recognizing learning. All these elements were to be incorporated in the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project, which was the actual follow-up of the discussions at the 7-8 July 2000 annual meeting of the ECTS counsellor group.

<sup>301</sup> Fritz Dalichow, CATS and EUROCATS, in: *EAIE Forum*. Vol 1. No. 3, Autumn 1999, 5-7.

<sup>302</sup> European Commission, ECTS Extension "Questions and Answers". These were published on the 'SOCRATES' pages, which do not exist anymore. Original text in Tuning Archive.

## In conclusion

From its initiation ECTS was the fruit of the commitment and vision of a relatively small number of European Commission officials supported by a small group of academics and administrators. Remarkable is the consistency of key people involved in developing the system over time. Setting up the system and rolling it out should be seen as a *tour de force*, because there was not much to build upon. All involved showed drive and the will to succeed. Having the experience of only two ERASMUS cohorts, it was obvious nevertheless that large scale student mobility could never be successful without a reliable instrument to indicate the volume of learning. This was already foreseen by the Adonnino Ad Hoc Committee. A credit system was perceived as one of the three factors for making possible recognition of studies taken abroad. Basing it on the notion of student workload proved to be sensible, but revolutionary. Clear was also that a common format was required to describe organisational and content information, the ECTS Information Package/ Course Catalogue. Besides these two, the third identified necessary factor was trust and confidence between the higher education institutions involved. The composition of the management team, European Commission and ERASMUS staff plus the five academics showed to be a successful formula. Although tensions occurred at and after the fifth Plenary Meeting in the autumn of 1992, there was real team spirit.

To answer the question raised at the beginning of this chapter how a revolutionary and ambitious idea – that is the development of a credit reference system based on student workload – was turned into a working system by a small inexperienced team, intensive cooperation was certainly one element. Another, probably as decisive, were the financial means made available by the European Commission. Furthermore, there was high awareness among the members of the Inner Circle that they were part of a Pilot that intended to have far-reaching consequences. The shared responsibility was perceived as an incentive.

As has been shown, many – if not all – of the issues related to student mobility and recognition of studies were intensely discussed during the six years of the Pilot Scheme phase. It operated not only as a form of ‘educational action research’ but also as a pressure cooker in coming up with quick solutions for a wide range of challenges, ranging from language preparation and grade conversion to thesis work and the inclusion of minors and subsidiary courses. During the pilot years also the administrative infrastructure was developed that are still in use today, such as (the formats of the) ECTS Information Package/ Course Catalogue, Application Forms, Learning Agreements and Transcript of Records. ECTS – besides the ICPs – proved also to be instrumental for organising the academic year better and to adjust the start and end dates of the academic year. Having a platform for discussing this type of issues proved to be an asset.

In retrospect a number of key moments can be identified in the development of ECTS. Besides the preparatory phase, the evaluation by a respected accountancy firm in 1992-93 proved to be such a moment. Coopers & Lybrand gave ECTS not only its fiat, but, as a result of its report, also status. This proved to be important for the extension activities after the termination of the Pilot phase in 1995. Additional funds and the offering of expertise for implementation allowed for wider implementation, which implied another key moment. The European Commission invested considerable funds to cover more subject areas and involve more higher education institutions. It also created an infrastructure for this aim. It set up a system of national helplines and installed an international group of promoters. This self-increasing 'grass-root' experts' group proved to be an effective instrument, not only for dissemination, but also for identifying obstacles. One of these proved to be a disappointing level of recognition of studies. Over the years, it became clear that flexibility had to be organised since higher education institutions and their staffs were generally captured in fixed structures. If not, the ECTS system would not reach the level of a main stream instrument and might even be marginalised to an instrument only applied for credit transfer for a small group of students.

Serious concern about the future role of ECTS resulted in the set-up by the European Commission of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. It should result in a bold step forward, an encompassing credit accumulation system for all types of learning. The project resulted in a double message, the need for a Lifelong Learning framework and an over-arching European credit accumulation and transfer framework. However, the working group was not able to offer clarity how to proceed further, it could not crack the puzzle it had created itself. This required another type of initiative, which would arise from the discussions of the ECTS counsellors group in the millennium year.





## 4. Making the Jump. From a European Credit Transfer System Towards a Credit Accumulation System

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### ABSTRACT

*Around 2000 a key group of ECTS promoters concluded that ECTS in its present form was no longer sustainable and that action was required. There were concerns about a lack of flexibility and the level of recognition. The group convinced the European Commission that the TUNING initiative would be ideally suited to address these concerns. What was thought necessary was the transformation of the European Credit Transfer System into a European credit transfer and accumulation system. It implied a change of its key features. It made it possible for ECTS to be a key component in developing the Tuning methodology for higher education reform. This required the transformation of ECTS into an accumulation system, and to obtain acceptance of it as the pan-European credit system. It conditioned close cooperation of the Tuning experts, the European Commission and the European University Association (EUA), which resulted in a number of official Bologna seminars, organised by the EUA and individual countries as part of the Bologna Process. One of the innovations was to link student workload to the achievement of learning, phrased in terms of competences to be obtained by the student. Credit should only be given when the intended level of competence – expressed as learning outcomes – would be met. Another innovation was turning ECTS into a planning instrument for developing high quality and feasible degree programmes. A point of discussion that arose, and which led to tensions with the United Kingdom, was the length of the academic year. Inventories made by Tuning and the EUA showed that the range of working hours for students per academic year was between 1500 and 1800 hours, which resulted in 25 to 30 hours per ECTS credit. The odd men out were the United Kingdom and Ireland with 1200 hours. This number of hours allowed for packing 90 ECTS into a full (calendar) year – 12 months – programme, which was unacceptable for continental European universities.*

*The issue has not been solved since then, and it remains a concern in terms of recognition of studies. The key point of disagreement was (and is) that the factor time is still of relevance (denied by the UK) even when the outcomes of a learning process are stated in learning outcomes. Related to this issue was of the ownership of ECTS, which was challenged by the EUA. The discussions about both issues even led to the termination by the EUA of the excellent relationship between the EUA and Tuning, which took nearly a decade to heal. During the same period, the European Commission as the founder and owner of ECTS, created a competitor for ECTS in the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) based on comparable features. The issue of ownership of ECTS returned*

when the Bologna Follow-up Group claimed it as part of developing the EHEA in 2012. The outcome was an endorsement of a revised ECTS Users' Guide at the Ministerial Bologna Follow-up Conference held in Yerevan in 2015. At present, nearly all of the 48 countries that have signed the Bologna Declaration are convinced ECTS is the key instrument for student-centred reform of higher education programme. What was once a bold idea, has become (a) reality.

## Introduction

Anno 2018 ECTS is the national credit and transfer system in all EU countries, with the exception of the Scotland, Bulgaria, Latvia and Sweden which run their own national system, which in all cases seems to be compatible to ECTS. In England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Czech Republic the use of a credit system is not a formal requirement. According to the *Bologna Progress Implementation Report 2018* 45 systems (out of 48) have indicated that all first and second cycle higher education programmes use ECTS (or ECTS compatible systems). According to the 2015 report this number was 36 in the years 2013/14. However, this number does not tell us much about the correct implementation or quality of the application of ECTS. According to the information collected in 2016/17, for the *Progress Report* ECTS (or compatible systems) credits are used nowadays for transfer and accumulation by nearly all higher education institutions for their first and second cycle programmes. It has been reported that in one third of the EHEA countries learning outcomes are not linked to ECTS credits.<sup>303</sup> Even if this is correct, the quality of these learning outcomes is doubtful and in the vast majority of cases are not underpinned by appropriate learning, teaching and assessment strategies and approaches, as is described in chapter 8, *A Long Way To Go*. This is confirmed by the report *Bologna with student eyes 2018. The Final Countdown*. In the report it is concluded that 'while ECTS points seem to be thoroughly implemented across EHEA, the situation with learning outcomes is more worrying ... only seven of the respondents stated that amount of credits are always based on the formulation of learning outcomes'. Regarding the related student-centred approach it remarks that 'it is disappointingly clear that there is still a long way to go. Student-centred learning in many ways depends on a shift towards outcome-based education and the use of learning outcomes methodology in general, but to date, not enough progress has been made in the implementation of these basic tools of the Bologna process'.<sup>304</sup>

<sup>303</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2018. Bologna Progress Implementation Report*. Brussels, 2018, 51-53.

<sup>304</sup> The European Students' Union (ESU), *Bologna with student eyes 2018. The Final Countdown*. Brussels, May 2018, 110.

It was Julia González, who had been a member of the steering group of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project, who suggested at the July 2000 meeting held in Bilbao to limit the ambitions to the higher education sector and to find a more strategic approach by focusing on the outcomes of the learning process to facilitate mobility as well as recognition of studies. She proposed to set-up a project comparable to the ECTS Pilot Scheme focusing on five subject areas and take it from there. After some initial discussions in September and October 2000 on what such a project should look like, it was agreed with the European Commission to cover two lines: 1. To tune educational structures by defining commonly understood and accepted profiles and competences to be developed and 2. To reflect at European level on the issues debated at country level, including the measuring of student workload and its relation to learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences'. The first line is discussed at length in chapter 6, *Output versus input*. Here, we concentrate on the second line. One of the four objectives defined for the Tuning project was the introduction of a common credit accumulation system by restructuring the transfer system. Involving around 100 academics in the Tuning project from a total of seven different subject areas, including a considerable number of ECTS counsellors, allowed for focusing on academic matters again instead of mainly technical aspects. It proved to be a brilliant move. In particular because the academics were not asked only to define the key competences for their subject area and to draw-up descriptors in terms of intended learning outcomes, but also to link these to ECTS credits. This offered the possibility to have in-depth discussions about what a European credit accumulation system should look like.

For that purpose three discussion papers were prepared on behalf of the Tuning Management Committee, which were presented under the heading 'New perspectives on ECTS as an Accumulation and Transfer System'; two by Robert Wagenaar and another by Stephen Adam. They proved to be of key importance for re-positioning ECTS. All papers were discussed in detail by the subject area groups before being finalized.

In this chapter the question will be answered what was required to convert ECTS from a transfer system used only for mobility purposes into a full-fledged overarching European credit transfer and accumulation system which would become the national credit system for the vast majority of Bologna signatory countries. A workload based system that developed into a system in which the awarding of credits depended on meeting the intended competences/ learning outcomes.

## Preparing the ground

Adam's paper focuses on the principles of a European credit accumulation framework, which he calls 'good practice guidelines'. Starting from the assump-

tion that a ‘fundamental aspect of the “Tuning of Educational Structures in Europe” project is to aid the development of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) into an over-arching pan-European credit *accumulation and transfer* framework’, he builds on the work done in the setting of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. Adam explains – in more general terms – the aims, the nature, the role of credits, levels and quality assurance in an overarching credit framework. He concludes that an effective system requires common principles and approaches to credits: ‘The more information and details that are given about the nature, context, level and application of credits, the more useful they become as a common currency for education recognition’.<sup>305</sup> This exactly is reflected in Wagenaar’s contributions.

It cracks a number of nuts. The title of the first paper offers a clear direction of its objective, the linking of ‘Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits’.<sup>306</sup> The items discussed are organized in 7 chapters which are all interrelated in understanding the phenomena of credits: (1) the role of credits; (2) allocation of credits to courses; (3) overall curriculum design(ing); (4) credits and level; (5) calculation of credits in terms of workload; (6) comparison of the length of academic years in Europe and, finally, (7) the relation between workload, teaching methods and learning outcomes. The most important ‘nut’ is the notion of *relative value* versus *absolute value* of credits. While for a transfer system the approach to apply that ‘credits allocated to courses are relative values reflecting the quantity of work required to complete a full year of academic study at a given institution’ might be acceptable, for an accumulation system it is not. An accumulation system – to be accepted and feasible – requires a formal basis, that is the *absolute value* of credits. This implies that credits are no longer calculated on an *ad hoc* proportional basis, but on the basis of officially recognized criteria. The two most important ones: the agreed length of the academic year preferably captured in national law and the notion that credits

<sup>305</sup> Stephen Adam, Principles of a Pan-European Credit Accumulation Framework: Good Practice Guidelines, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 215-222, quotes: 215, 221.

<sup>306</sup> The paper builds on a discussion paper prepared and circulated in September 2000 as well as on a preparatory meeting of ECTS experts in the Tuning Management Committee followed-up by an ECTS Counsellors meeting which both took place in Osnabrück on respectively 5 and 6-7 July 2001. A first draft of the paper outlined here was discussed by the Tuning Subject Area Groups at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuning project meeting (21-22 September 2001); a second draft was reflected upon at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuning project meeting (16-17 November 2001), the third – more complete draft – was discussed at the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuning project meeting (15-16 March 2002). The final paper was presented at the Closing Conference of Tuning Phase 1 in the European Commission Charlemagne Building on 31 May 2002. This version was published in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 223-246.

are not an entity in itself, but ‘always describe work completed which is part of a curriculum’.<sup>307</sup>

The latter resulted in the principle that ‘a credit is a unit which reflects a certain amount of work successfully done at a certain level for a recognized qualification, implying that credits are not interchangeable automatically from one context to another’. This amount of work is expressed in terms of time required by a typical student to complete a course unit successfully. Introducing this definition neutralized the fear that credit accumulation might lead to a ‘cafeteria model’. It was also made clear again that credits are not based on the number of teaching hours nor on the complexity or importance of a topic. In other words: *credits per se* have only one dimension, that is student workload. This made it necessary to also link ECTS to the learning paradigm applied: teacher-centred or student-oriented. It is stipulated in the paper that the first model or system is ‘generally time independent, based on the assumption that the proper object of study is what the individual professor thinks the student should learn in his or her course’. In the student-centred approach greater weight is given to ‘the design of the overall curriculum and focuses especially on the usefulness of study programmes for a future position of the graduate in society. With respect to this latter approach a correct allocation of credits as well as a sensible definition of learning outcomes play a decisive role’.<sup>308</sup>

This brings us to overall curriculum design on the basis of identified intended or desired generic and subject specific competences formulated as learning outcomes, both at programme and at module/unit level. In this context, the paper mentions the option of modular and non-modular systems. Curriculum design is the bridge to another nut to crack: levels. In addition to a quantitative framework of credits it is though best – if not inevitable – to link credits to learning outcomes, defined as what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning’. The paper pays tribute in this context to the work done by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the organisations responsible for defining a Qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>309</sup> Learning outcomes add the dimension of level to credits, because together they allow for defining entrance and exit requirements for cycles, study years and course units. They also make it possible to develop cumulative programmes and/or identify progression routing.<sup>310</sup>

<sup>307</sup> Robert Wagenaar, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 224-5, 228.

<sup>308</sup> Ibidem, 231-2.

<sup>309</sup> CQFW, NICATS, NUCCAT and SEEC, *Credit and HE Qualifications. Credit Guidelines for HE Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. November 2001.

<sup>310</sup> Robert Wagenaar, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits, 237-238.

The paper indicates the necessity of level descriptors or indicators and course *type* descriptors to be related to individual course units. It proposes a code system making a distinction between four levels – basic, intermediate, advanced and specialized and three types – core, related and minor (optional or subsidiarity).<sup>311</sup> Although the code system as such was never implemented, the notion of different types and levels kept playing a central role, in particular in defining level descriptors and indicators for both generic competences and subject specific ones. This still is the case.

A final nut to crack was that of the role of ‘time’ in the learning process. It proved to be the most challenging one. From the very start of the Tuning initiative, it was clear that it would be helpful to find common ground for solving the ‘time’ issue. This required reliable information of the state of affairs in the different member countries. For this purpose questionnaires were prepared to gain insight into the length of higher education degree programmes for the subject areas involved in the project (in years and ECTS credits) as well as organization (undivided/semesters/ trimesters) and length – measured in terms of weeks – of the academic year. The length of degree programmes was the topic of the second paper prepared by Wagenaar. Whether measured in academic years or ECTS credits, it showed large variations between countries and disciplines, but also between programmes from the same subject areas taught in different countries. This was the topic to be solved by the Bologna countries together and a given for the Tuning project. In the paper a number of principles were outlined which would allow for a feasible two cycle system and the level of flexibility in terms of time to meet comparable learning outcomes.<sup>312</sup>

Regarding the academic year a distinction was made in the Tuning surveys between the actual teaching periods and the preparation for and actual examination periods. The outcome of the survey was included as a table in two of the Tuning meeting documents, but in the end it was decided not to publish them.<sup>313</sup> It proved very difficult to obtain reliable data. In summary, the conclusion was that an academic year of a regular programme counted in the vast majority of countries 34 to 40 weeks. In terms of hours it was calculated that 1 ECTS credit point reflected 25-30 working hours. This was thought an acceptable range. In this context the notion of ‘notional learning time’ was introduced, which was defined

<sup>311</sup> This code system is based on a proposal of the EU Thematic ‘European Physics Education Network’ (EUPEN).

<sup>312</sup> Robert Wagenaar, *The Length of Higher Education Degree Programmes in Europe: Contribution to the Debate by the Tuning Project*, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 247-251 and Appendix II Length of Studies, 301-316.

<sup>313</sup> Tuning Educational Structure in Europe. Meeting Document 2, Working Papers, 10-11.; Tuning Educational Structure in Europe. Meeting Document 3, Working Papers. Educational structures, Workload, Credits and Learning outcomes, annex 1, 13.

as the 'number of hours which is expected a student (at a particular level) will need, on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at that level. It was acknowledged that the actual time spent would differ per student, because of many factors influencing the effectiveness of the learning process. Identified as factors were: diversity of traditions, curriculum design and context, coherence of the curriculum, teaching and learning methods, methods of assessment and performance, organization of teaching, ability and diligence of the student, and financial support by public or private funds.<sup>314</sup>

'Time' would become a topic of controversy in the years to come, in particular between the UK and continental Europe. It started with the argument made in Wagenaar's paper that if it was accepted that a 'normal'/regular study programme should contain 36 to 40 weeks, there remained 10 weeks in which additional work could be done. For example in the setting of a Summer course, but also in case of so-called 'full calendar year Master programmes' (of 12 months) as developed in the UK and Ireland. From the perspective of fairness, such a programme could be allocated a maximum of 75 ECTS credits, equalling 46-50 working weeks. This position reflected the common opinion of the July 2001 ECTS counsellors meeting.<sup>315</sup> This *communis opinio* would last long. In the meantime, British authorities and university leadership in particular (the Irish did not push the argument very much) claimed that the official length of their programmes was 1200 hours, which therefore allowed for three semesters of 600 hours each, making 1800 hours for a full calendar programme, which in their opinion equalled 90 ECTS credits.

The ECTS Counsellor Group and Tuning set the principle that the length of a 90 ECTS programme should be based on 14 study months (excluding holidays). By accepting the range of 25 to 30 working hours per credit, it was also agreed that an academic programme should imply 1500 to 1800 working hours. It was noted that the longest programmes in terms of hours were those in the natural sciences, engineering and medicine as a result of lab-related activities. The implication was clear: resulting from the UK position, 1800 hours could lead to a programme of 60 *and* of 90 credits. Although the efficiency argument as outlined above was accepted, this gap was perceived as simply too wide. The controversy obtained a new dimension when UK authorities and their universities claimed that in a learning outcomes based system, time was no longer a relevant factor. It was Stephen Adam who would become the advocate and spokesman of this argument. He would prepare a considerable number reports in the context of the official Bologna seminars. He could not hide however, that in official UK docu-

<sup>314</sup> Robert Wagenaar, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits, 243.

<sup>315</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Report of the meeting of the Management Committee in Osnabrück, Germany, 05/07/2001.

ments it was stated that an academic year in the UK contained 1200 hours. The UK credit system being based on the notion of 120 CATS, implied that one CATS equalled 10 student hours of work and 2 CATS therefore 20 hours, not fitting the ECTS range of 25-30 hours.

The UK approach implied that the learning outcomes of a UK full calendar Master programme would be comparable to three or even four semester European continental Second Cycle/ Master programmes. The issue kept coming back in the following years. This is no surprise, given the fact that for British universities there was very much at stake, their budgets being highly dependent on overseas students and the attractiveness of the 12 months Master programme for those students.

What became obvious was a completely different perception of and approach to the transformation of ECTS into an accumulation system. Experts focusing on lifelong learning used the accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APL/APEL) model as their main argument for neglecting the factor time. In those models the focus is on what has been learned, not on how it was learned and/or how long this learning required in terms of time. Tuning, instead, advocated first and foremost the implementation of ECTS as an accumulation system in the context of formal learning. Lifelong learning – which also may involve (recognition of) informal and non-formal learning – was thought to be of later concern. Taking lifelong learning as the argument for accumulation would jeopardize the chances of successfully introducing a European-wide accumulation system, it was thought, particularly, because recognition of studies taken at another institution had already proved to be a tremendous challenge since the launch of the ERASMUS mobility programme. Tuning also took seriously the expressed fear for introducing a cafeteria (*à la carte*) model, as had become clear in the preparation of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. For that reason, it was explicitly stated in Wagenaar's paper that 'credits are not interchangeable automatically from one context to another'. For a good understanding of the debate, at the time, both lifelong learning and APL/APEL were in their initial stage of development. The only country that was running a sophisticated system for recognition of prior and informal and formal learning was France.

Due to the fact that key ECTS international counsellors were included in the Tuning Management Committee or were participating as members of one of the Subject Area Groups, ECTS and Tuning operated in conjunction from 2001 onward. The interaction was even strengthened when the newly established European University Association (EUA) – resulting from the merger of the Association of European Universities (CRE) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' – took over the ECTS coordinating role from the University of Strathclyde starting with the academic year 2001-2002, some three months after the formal launch of the Tuning project. The coordinating role was



taken up by Lesley Wilson, the EUA Secretary General, supported by the project manager, Sylvie Brochu. In February 2001 Ginette Nabavi, who had acted as the responsible European Commission policy officer since 1997, announced the Commission had decided to change its policies by limiting the number of the annual site visits to 50 again and to offer more support to the National Helplines installed at the end of 2000.<sup>316</sup> These helplines, which were coordinated at the request of the European Commission by Volker Gehmlich of the Fachhochschule Osnabrück, were also the coordinators of national counsellor teams. The appointment of 30 national coordinators mid-2002 was thought necessary following the expansion of the group of counsellors to 80 when they met for their annual meeting in Graz on 6-7 July 2002.<sup>317</sup> The tasks of the counsellors from then on also included the promotion of the Diploma Supplement.

In April 2001 Peter van der Hijden took over the position and role of Nabavi. As a consequence, he also became the contact person for Tuning. He soon started with the preparation of a new information campaign, which was launched on 1 December 2002. Five 'special measures for the promotion of ECTS' were identified in a paper distributed to the higher education sector: (1) an ECTS introduction grant for institutions which were newcomers to ECTS; (2) an ECTS label for institutions 'which apply ECTS the proper way in all first and second cycle programmes'; (3) an ECTS Credit Accumulation Grant for institutions which have the ECTS label and wish to introduce mechanisms for credit accumulation (credits for lifelong learning); (4) ECTS/DS Counsellors for offering advice; (5) ECTS/DS Counsellors site visits to selected institutions.<sup>318</sup>

One of the objectives of this information campaign was to give momentum to the first official Bologna 'Seminar', dubbed conference, organized by the EUA in October 2002, of which the topic was 'Credit Transfer and Accumulation – the Challenge for Institutions and Students'. The conference, which was a co-production of the EUA and the Swiss Confederation Conference and hosted by ETH Zürich, was organized in close cooperation with the ECTS counsellors group. Many counsellors would act as facilitator/ presenter. The seminar could be perceived as a follow-up of the 'Bologna International Seminar on Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems' organized in Leiria on 23-24 November 2000. The key note speakers at that seminar were Pedro Lourtie (rapporteur of the first

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<sup>316</sup> E-mail Volker Gehmlich on National Helplines, dated 17 November 2000.

<sup>317</sup> ECTS/DS Counselling and Site Visit Programme, Supported by the SOCRATES programme of the European Commission. Coordinated by the European University Association (EUA), ECTS/DS Counsellors' pool, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2002..

<sup>318</sup> European Commission, SOCRATES- ERASMUS. Special measures for the promotion of ECTS and DS. Brussels 2 December 2002; European Commission, SOCRATES – ERASMUS. Special measures for the promotion of ECTS and DS. Brussels, 2 December 2002. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EC%20doc%20on%20the%20promotion%20of%20ECTS-%20DS.1068807686692.pdf>

Bologna Follow-up Ministerial Conference, held in Prague in 2001), Volker Gehmlich and Julia González. González presented Tuning for the very first time to a wider audience. In his report on the conference the General Rapporteur Stephen Adam notes that González convinced her audience that the project ‘would serve to refine and test all the problems and difficulties associated with developing ECTS as an accumulation system’. Adam concludes that there was a ‘strong endorsement’ of the proposed Tuning project.<sup>319</sup>

At the Graz meeting of July 2002 it was decided to set up a small key group coordinated by Robert Wagenaar to come up with new ECTS features.<sup>320</sup> The plan was to discuss and validate them at the first meeting of National coordinators scheduled for 8-9 November 2002. At the beginning of September the EUA asked Wagenaar whether these could already be made available for the Zürich conference to take place on 11-12 October 2002.<sup>321</sup> It took 7 versions to arrive to an agreed text to be distributed at the Conference.<sup>322</sup> It would serve as the core of its ‘Conclusions and Recommendations for Action’. The report distinguishes ECTS as a transfer system (facilitate transfer and recognition and promote key aspects of the European dimension of higher education) and an accumulation system (supports widespread curricular reform in national systems, enables widespread mobility, facilitates lifelong learning and recognition of informal and non-formal learning, promotes flexibility in learning and qualification processes, facilitates access to the labour market and enhances the Bologna objective transparency and comparability of European systems and promotes the attractiveness of European higher education towards the rest of the world). It identifies as the key goals of ECTS to improve transparency and comparability of study programmes and qualifications and to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications.<sup>323</sup>

Besides outlining the objectives, the report identifies 8 key features of which the most important is: ‘ECTS is a student-centred system based on the *student*

<sup>319</sup> Stephen Adam, International Seminar Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems, Leiria 23-24 November 2000. Report of the General Rapporteur. See also: EHEA website, Work Programme 1999-2001. International Seminar on Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems. Bologna Seminar Leiria, Portugal 24/11/2000 – 25/11/2000. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100286/seminar-on-credit-accumulation-and-transfer-systems.html>

<sup>320</sup> Besides Robert Wagenaar, the members of the group were Volker Gehmlich, Stephen Adam, Julia González and Maria Sticchi-Damiani.

<sup>321</sup> E-mail from Sylvia Brochu on behalf of Lesley Wilson to Robert Wagenaar on preparation of ECTS Key Features, dated 6 September 2002.

<sup>322</sup> E-mail from Robert Wagenaar to the EUA representatives and the members of the working group of national counsellors on ECTS Key Features, dated 8 October 2002.

<sup>323</sup> European University Association, Credit Transfer and Accumulation – the Challenges for Institutions and Students. EUA/Swiss Confederation Conference. ETH Zürich, 11/12 October 2002. Conclusions and Recommendations for Action. Brussels, December 2002, 2. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/events/past/2002/Autumn-Conference-2002.aspx>

*workload* required to achieve the objectives of a programme. These objectives are preferably specified in terms of *learning outcomes*. Also two other features included are of crucial significance for the notion of making ECTS an accumulation system: (1) ECTS are used to describe entire study programmes on the basis of their official length; and (2) credits are not automatically interchangeable from one context to another. They can only be used to obtain a recognized qualification when they constitute an approved part of the study programme'.<sup>324</sup> It is obvious that both the objectives and the key features were very much in line with the Tuning project.

It is interesting to note that in the key features, as presented in the conclusions, the range of hours linked to one ECTS credits is absent. This was the result of severe lobbying of the British participants at the meeting. They met separately during the meeting to organise their position. At the concluding session this became very visible, as one UK speaker after the other took the floor to stress that 'time' was an insignificant factor for a system based on learning outcomes in a lifelong learning context. It showed very clearly to all 330 participants of the seminar that the UK higher education sector had something to lose and would go to any length to defend the 180 CATS/ 90 ECTS full-year master programmes. Although relevant to highlight because of the discussions to come, more important were the EUA recommendations as an outcome of the seminar. The EUA members were asked to 'commit themselves to implementing ECTS in line with the objectives and key features outlined in this document' and to 'ensure that they are fully aware of the potential of ECTS for supporting curricular reform'.<sup>325</sup> In retrospect this seminar on ECTS proved to be one of the most crucial official seminars that took place, and comparable in importance to the ones on the (length of the) Bachelor degree and the Master degree.

That the issue of time continued to be a hot potato for the UK can be derived from the fact that Adam and Wagenaar were invited at Universities UK headquarters in London on 13 June 2003 for a discussion on 'The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System' in the setting of the EWNI Credit Forum. It was a follow-up of a SEEC Conference<sup>326</sup> that had taken place on 21 March 2003 at which both ECTS counsellors/ Tuning representatives had given a key note. The other key notes were delivered by the president of Universities UK, Roderick Floud and by Paul Bridges, Chair of Northern Universities Consortium for Cred-

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<sup>324</sup> Ibidem, 2-3.

<sup>325</sup> Idem, 3-4.

<sup>326</sup> Established in 1985, originally SEEC stood for the 'South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation & Transfer', it has grown to cover institutions across the south and midlands although events are primarily held in London.

it Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT).<sup>327</sup> In this context it is also interesting to note that Universities UK prepared a special briefing for UK participants of the second EUA Convention of European higher education institutions, that had taken place the previous month. One year later these initiatives got a follow-up in the paper *Master degrees and the Bologna Process*, prepared by the Europe Unit of Universities UK. It offers additional arguments in favour of the 12 months Master degree. The paper was meant for Vice Chancellors, Principals, European and International Officers.<sup>328</sup>

The debate on the role and position of ECTS was reflected in the Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education, resulting from their meeting in Berlin on 19 September 2003. It shows full support for the initiatives to transform ECTS: ‘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’. Furthermore, they asked those working on the development of 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’. This again was related to another wish – inspired by the Tuning project – ‘to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile’.<sup>329</sup>

Notwithstanding the UK lobby, at the meeting of national ECTS/DS counsellors taking place in November 2002, one month after the Zürich Conference, the range of number of hours of an academic year, 1500-1800 hours, that is 25-30 hours per ECTS credit was included in the key features again, accompanied with the phrase ‘in most cases’. This did not come as a surprise because it was the common denominator resulting from a short survey carried out by EUA in co-op-

<sup>327</sup> EWNI Credit Forum. Meeting with ECTS Counsellors to discuss: The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. Board Room Universities UK, Woburn House, 13 June 2003; Report of the SEEC Conference. Prepared by Sarah J. Gershon, Vice-Chair SEEC, 24 March 2003.

<sup>328</sup> Universities UK, *The second convention of European Higher Education Institutions: Briefing for UK Higher Education Institutions. 29-31 May 2003, Graz*. In particular the part on ‘ECTS and the Tuning project’, 36-38, paragraphs 122-134. This document was especially prepared for the UK participants of the EUA Graz Convention. It also announced a 75 minutes preparatory meeting for these participants; Europe Unit of Universities UK, *Master degrees and the Bologna Process*, London, 13 July 2004..

<sup>329</sup> Berlin Communiqué 2003 -, “Realising the European Higher Education Area”. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education on 19 September 2003. Berlin, 2003.

eration with the ECTS/DS national coordinators, produced for the Zürich Conference. It has to be stated here, however, that for most countries the number of hours of an academic year /the number of hours per ECTS credit was not (yet) included in national legislation in 2002.<sup>330</sup>

Having reached agreement on the key features of an ECTS transfer and accumulation system by making the awarding of ECTS credits dependent on the achievement of the defined learning outcomes, the group of national counsellors started working on a new edition of the ECTS Users' Guide. At that time, it had already been decided to keep ECTS as the acronym for reasons of continuity and branding. From 2002 ECTS would stand for *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*. With the objective in mind that the next Users' Guide should be a help for implementation and should therefore also offer precise guidance and include 'Frequently Asked Questions', it took about one and a half year to complete. Its preparation involved many national counsellors and five seminars/meetings, including two annual ones for all counsellors (Antwerp, Bilbao and Wroclaw in 2003, Letterkenny and Debrecen in 2004). The final editing was done by Ann Katherine Isaacs and Robert Wagenaar, which again showed the overlap with Tuning.<sup>331</sup> The Tuning influence can be derived from the fact that the concept of competences was introduced in relation to learning outcomes. But also in other Tuning materials which were integrated in the ECTS Guide such as the chapter on student workload, in which its calculation is described on the basis of the four step approach developed by Tuning, and the relation between competences and learning outcomes.

The ECTS Users' Guide 2004/5 was published on the website of the European Commission in a downloadable format. The key features of the now 'European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System' were made available in the same year in a nine pages official publication of the European Commission.<sup>332</sup> The 2004/5 edition would be replaced five years later. During this time span a lot

<sup>330</sup> European University Association (EUA), *ECTS Counselling and Site Visit Programme. The state of implementation of ECTS in Europe. A short survey carried out by EUA in co-operation with the ECTS/DS national coordinators*. Brussels, 2002.

<sup>331</sup> The final responsibility for the content of the Users' Guide was with Peter van der Hijden, representing the European Commission. Ann Katharine Isaacs was (and is), besides counsellor for Italy, co-coordinator of the Tuning Subject Area Group for History.

<sup>332</sup> European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide*. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement. Brussels, 17 August 2004. Tuning Archive; European Commission, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Key Features. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004. ISBN 92-894-4742-7. The publication can be approached from: <http://netceng.eu/downloads//useful-information/ECTS%20Key%20features%20-%20EN.pdf>. This publication included the website of the ECTS Users' Guide: [http://Europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/Socrates/ects\\_en.html](http://Europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/Socrates/ects_en.html). This website is no longer active since the termination of the Socrates Programme, which was followed-up by the Lifelong Learning programme. A print of the Users' Guide 2004 is kept in the Tuning Archive.

happened and was discussed in relation to ECTS, but this had a limited effect on the essence of its key features, as can be concluded from the overview ‘ECTS Key Features over time’, included as an annex to this chapter.

## Bologna Process context

For obvious reasons a number of conferences were organized – in particular in the UK – to highlight and promote the use of learning outcomes in the educational process. The one that obtained most attention was the official United Kingdom Bologna Seminar, entitled ‘Using Learning Outcomes’. The seminar took place in Edinburgh on 1-2 July 2004 and attracted 150 delegates from 26 Bologna countries. As input for the seminar a background paper was prepared by Stephen Adam, which he presented at the seminar.<sup>333</sup> In the paper he showed an overview of activities related to the learning outcomes approach in the different Bologna countries based on information obtained from the 40 members of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and some 100 ECTS/DS counsellors. He summarized the information in a snapshot which showed initiatives – varying from small to large – in 28 countries. He noted activities in 97% of the EU countries.<sup>334</sup> His overview reflects the mood of the time well, but it was not necessarily a realistic overview. The main conclusion that was drawn from the seminar suggests that the BFUG ‘could take a lead role in ensuring coherence across the different strands affected by learning outcomes: in particular the relationship between ECTS and qualifications frameworks, Tuning, Diploma Supplements, and quality assurance, and more broadly between the Bologna and Copenhagen processes’.<sup>335</sup> This was one of the seminars that offered input for the Ministerial Bologna Follow-up Conference 2005 to be held in Bergen, Norway. ECTS does not appear once in the text of the Communiqué. However, it is stated in the text that ‘We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, com-

<sup>333</sup> Stephen Adam, *Using Learning Outcomes. A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing ‘learning outcomes’ at the local, national and international levels*. United Kingdom Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh Conference Centre) Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2004. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: [http://media.ehea.info/file/Learning\\_Outcomes\\_Edinburgh\\_2004/76/8/040620LEARNING\\_OUTCOMES-Adams\\_577768.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/Learning_Outcomes_Edinburgh_2004/76/8/040620LEARNING_OUTCOMES-Adams_577768.pdf). Among the speakers, the ECTS/DS Counsellors Julia González, Richard Whewell and Robert Wagenaar. See programme, retrieved on 18 June 2018: [http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol\\_semin/Edinburgh/programme.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/programme.pdf)

<sup>334</sup> Stephen Adam, Power Point Using Learning Outcomes, slides 12-14. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: [http://aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol\\_semin/Edinburgh/S\\_Adam\\_Bacgrerep\\_presentation.pdf](http://aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/S_Adam_Bacgrerep_presentation.pdf)

<sup>335</sup> UK Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004. Report for BFUG. Prepared by Ann McVie on behalf of the UK Seminar Organising Committee. September 2004. Retrieved on 18 June from: [http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol\\_semin/Edinburgh/11\\_03\\_Edinb\\_Report.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/11_03_Edinb_Report.pdf)

prising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles'.<sup>336</sup>

As has been outlined in chapter 2, *The Bologna Process on the March*, the inclusion of 'credit ranges' in both the framework and the Communiqué proved not to be self-evident. In a letter to the BFUG, dated 4 March 2004, the EUA on behalf of the ECTS National Coordinators asked to ensure that their work done hitherto on ECTS would feed into discussions of the 'EQF', to ensure 'consultation of the ECTS counsellors and their inclusion in the structures being established' and to 'ensure that the 'outcomes of the ECTS counsellors' discussion on the link between credits and levels (...) are included in the envisaged EQF project'. For this purpose an EUA working group on 'ECTS, levels and the European Qualifications Framework' was established, consisting of 7 counsellors.<sup>337</sup> The letter was timely, because at the end of March 2004 the 'working group on an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA' as well as the terms of reference were established. Its six country representatives would be supported by 'technical expertise'. As an outcome of the meeting of the EUA working group on levels on 19 May 2004, the EUA and national ECTS counsellors came up with a firmly formulated recommendation 'regarding the role of ECTS in the elaboration of a 'European Qualifications Framework'. It had 13 points. The key message was that the overarching framework should be ECTS credit-based. In other words it should be a 'Credit and Qualifications Framework'. Furthermore, it expressed the need 'for a further subdivision of the existing Bologna 3 cycles into "sub-levels" in order to cover progression through the higher education system' and stated that the 'use of credits permits the necessary articulation between sub-levels and cycles each with their own specific learning outcomes'.<sup>338</sup>

The message did not land, due in particular to opposition from the UK members of the group, which made up half of the experts/consultants. The BFUG working group would meet 6 times. After the fourth meeting the EUA concluded that the recommendations were not taken on board. It asked Wagenaar to represent the organization at the last two meetings. The outcome of coordinated action at the fifth meeting, which took place in Budapest in the autumn of 2004, resulted in the inclusion of credit ranges for the first and second cycle in the Quali-

<sup>336</sup> Bergen Communiqué 2005 – The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the Goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005.

<sup>337</sup> The working group consisted of the following members: Stephen Adam (UK), Paul Bonde (DK), Danny Brenna (IRL), Andrejs Rauvargers (also a formal member of the BFUG EQF working group) (LV), John Reilly (UK), Maria Sticchi-Damiani (IT), Robert Wagenaar (NL) and the representatives of the EUA Lesley Wilson and Sylvie Brochu.

<sup>338</sup> Recommendation from EUA and the national ECTS counsellors regarding the role of ECTS in the elaboration of a European Qualifications Framework. Brussels, 23 June 2004.

cations Framework for the EHEA.<sup>339</sup> The integration of sub-levels was a bridge too far.

The annual meeting of the ECTS/DS counsellors, held in Debrecen on 9-10 July 2004 meant the end of an era. In the spring of 2004 the Commission proposed to turn the ECTS/DS counsellors into Bologna promoters, that is to broaden their tasks to cover all agreed Bologna action lines. The BFUG agreed with this proposal on the condition that the national teams would operate under supervision of the national authorities. This included the selection and appointment of members of the teams, although the European Commission was expected to continue to finance their activities. The European Commission, represented by director David Coyne accepted this condition astonishingly easily. The setback was that in a number of countries the counsellors/ experts were (partly) replaced after a selection process in which relevant expertise was not the decisive condition for appointment. It meant a reduction in the effectiveness of the teams in those countries. Around the same time, the European Commission decided to stop financing Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs). Its effect was a substantial weakening of the European Commission's position in steering the modernisation process for higher education, because it cut the direct link with the academics in the field. The academics directly involved in the modernisation process perceived this as a strategic mistake of the highest order which is still greatly regretted.

## Challenging the ownership

After the Bergen Ministerial meeting, the UK took over the Secretariat of the BFUG from Norway to prepare for the next Bologna Follow-up meeting to be held in London in 2007. In these years activities concentrated on the development of national qualifications frameworks. It was also the period in which the European Commission took the initiative – with the Copenhagen Process in mind that focused on the VET sector – to set up the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF for LLL) which intended to cover all learning. As members of the working group to develop the EQF were appointed as representatives for the higher education sector: Mogens Berg, Stephen Adam and Robert Wagenaar, who all three had been – in different roles – part of the BFUG working group responsible for the QF for the EHEA. Their efforts to make the EQF credit based, were not successful. This was not because the VET sector was a priori against credits, but it did not enthusiastically embrace ECTS – on the contrary.

<sup>339</sup> Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, February 2005



To the surprise of the ECTS counsellor group, the Commission at this time started the development of a credit system especially meant for the VET sector: the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). It received the blessing of the European Parliament and the Council in 2009 when a Recommendation was passed.<sup>340</sup> Recommendations are not binding acts. They intend to offer guidance to the EU countries for policy-making. It came one year after the adoption of the Recommendation to establish the EQF for Lifelong Learning. In the 'recommendation' on ECVET, the system is defined as 'a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, a transfer and accumulation process and complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and ECVET users' guides'. Key are the concepts of 'units' and 'associated points'. A unit is defined as 'a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated with a number of associated ECVET points. According to the concept as included in the recommendation 'ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes for the particular qualification to which they refer and they reflect the achievement and accumulation of units. To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET'.<sup>341</sup> The double emphasis on learning outcomes and formal time spent, demonstrates that ECVET and ECTS are in fact one and the same credit system.

ECVET points represented 'a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification.' These points did not show up in its accumulation principle: 'A qualification comprises in principle several units and is made up of the whole set of units. Thus, a learner can achieve a qualification by accumulating the required units, achieved in different countries and different contexts (formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal), while respecting national legislation relating to the accumulation of units and the recognition of learning outcomes'. Having ECTS already in place and with the intention to operate in a lifelong learning context a reference to ECTS could not be avoided:

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<sup>340</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (Text with EEA relevance) (2009/C 155/02). Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF>

<sup>341</sup> Ibidem.

‘This Recommendation should facilitate the compatibility, comparability and complementarity of credit systems used in VET and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (‘ECTS’), which is used in the higher education sector, and thus should contribute to greater permeability between levels of education and training, in accordance with national legislation and practice.’<sup>342</sup>

The driving force behind establishing ECVET was the Frenchman Michel Aribaud. Like Peter van der Hijden who was responsible for ECTS, he was employed at the Directorate General for Education and Culture. Aribaud started his activities for ECVET in 2004.<sup>343</sup> In preparation of a credit system meant for the VET sector only, he attended a number of meetings of the ECTS counsellor group. It had not much effect. Central in the discussions that ECTS counsellors had with Aribaud was the notion that there was no need for ECVET, because ECTS principles were very well suited to also meet the needs of the ECVET sector. Having one system would also be in the interest of the EQF for Lifelong Learning. Although many of the elements of ECTS and ECVET were comparable and compatible, the sticky issue was the allocation of points to units. To establish the relative weight of a unit three factors were identified: (1) relative importance of the learning outcomes; (2) complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes and (3) effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences required.<sup>344</sup>

In fact these three factors are confusing reformulations of the ECTS credit definition with the double emphasis on learning outcomes and their associated workload. Already in the first years of the ECTS Pilot Scheme these kind of factors were perceived as arbitrary and therefore unworkable, as subjective and not quantifiable. However, observed with some intellectual distance, the reader will notice that the two credit systems ECTS and ECVET in its core are in fact one and the same.

David Coyne, Director for Lifelong Learning, Education and Training Policies at the Directorate General for Education and Culture realized that having two (competing) systems was not very helpful in practice. Not in the least for the VET sector. He showed both intellectual distance and engagement when in June 2005

<sup>342</sup> Idem.

<sup>343</sup> Background Michel Aribaud. Before joining the European Commission he was inspector in charge of Vocational education and training and head of the French Ministry of Education department ‘Validation des acquis de l’expérience (VAE)’ (validation and recognition of achieved non formal and informal learning). Representing the French Government, he was a member of the Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer in VET that produced its *First Report on Credit Transfer in VET November 2002 – October 2003*, in 2003. Report retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: [https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/foko6\\_neues-aus-europa\\_o8\\_anlage.pdf](https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/foko6_neues-aus-europa_o8_anlage.pdf)

<sup>344</sup> European Commission, DG Education and Culture, *The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), Get to know ECVET better. Questions and Answers*. Revised edition 2011. Brussels, 23.

he addressed the ‘Advisory Committee for Vocational Training’, a tripartite body established in 1963 under the then Treaty establishing the Europe Economic Community. In doing so, Coyne, sensed his holistic (and historic) responsibility to help for citizens who want to engage in lifelong learning, not being bothered by artificial boundaries set up between general education on the one hand and vocational education and training on the other. He therefore proposed to the committee members to have one single European credit system for Lifelong Learning, which could even have a new name if that would help get all sectors on board. Suggested was ‘European Credit Transfer System for Lifelong Learning’ (ELC). Unfortunately, the members, in particular the governments’ group, of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training did not grasp the historic opportunity they had to build a bridge between general education and vocational training. Instead, they choose to keep things separate and continue down the safe but unfruitful road of separate development.<sup>345</sup>

Partly this was due to the set up and presentation of ECVET, not as a mere credit system, but as a vast and ambitious scheme that would solve all curricula, quality and recognition problems one could imagine existing in vocational education and training. A laudable goal (not unlike the ambitions of the Tuning Project in higher education), but this ‘catch all’ approach, unfortunately, blurred the readability and effectiveness of ECVET as a credit system in the strict sense of the word. Over the years, credit points were played down in ECVET and it concentrated on the concept of units. As a result ECVET no longer can be called a credit system, an opinion which seems to be shared by the European Commission according to a note which was sent in June 2016 to the ECVET stakeholders.<sup>346</sup>

<sup>345</sup> European Commission, DG EAC, Advisory Committee on Vocational Training. Meeting of 16 and 17 June 2005.

Minutes. CCFP\_03 2005. Document obtained from the European Commission on request. It was in particular the German representative Peter Thiele on behalf of the Governments’ representatives group who argued in favour of a separate VET credit strategy. The other two groups represented, ‘employers’ and ‘workers’ argued they could not oversee the consequences of developing a combined system, but did not take an explicit position. In its meeting of 13 December 2007 the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training delivered a positive opinion on the main elements of the proposal to set up ECVET. Commission of the European Communities, Recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) [SEC(2008) 442 SEC(2008) 443]. Brussels, 9.4.2008 COM(2008) 180 final

2008/0070 (COD), 5. Retrieved 07-10-2018: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008PC0180&from=EN>

<sup>346</sup> European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Skills, Note to the ECVET Users’ Group Members and the Coordinators of National Teams of ECVET Experts. Subject: Discussion on the future of ECVET. Brussels, 16 June 2016. In this note it is stated: ‘Even though ECVET was formally established as a credit system, the experience gained so far shows that: ECVET has not been used as a credit system that regulates the allocation and transfer of

The disappointment about the Commission's ECVET initiative was not limited to the ECTS/Diploma Supplement counsellors group. The EUA was also not amused. It made it an issue in its *Lisbon Declaration of 2007, Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a common purpose*: 'Universities strongly urge the European Commission to build on the achievements of ECTS in the further development of proposals for a credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). Every effort should be made to avoid the existence of two separate credit systems within one lifelong learning strategy.'<sup>347</sup>

In the years until the London Ministerial meeting (2007) ECTS did not receive much attention. None of the official Bologna seminars were devoted to the topic. When preparing the London Communiqué there was some excitement or rather agitation, when the UK tried to decouple learning outcomes from student workload, that is notional time. It did not find support among the other countries. The paragraph that was included in the London Communiqué of 18 May 2007, 'Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world', reads 'Efforts should concentrate in future on removing barriers to access and progression between cycles and on proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload.'<sup>348</sup> This did not mean the UK higher education sector gave up although it never intended to replace its own Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) by ECTS.<sup>349</sup> Universities UK claims in its Europe Note, published on 20 July 2009<sup>350</sup>, that as a result of UK higher education lobbying, the European Commission agreed to review ECTS in 2007. It seems too much honour. Already in March 2007 the ECTS counsellors discussed updating the ECTS Users' Guide, including the reference to the (lengths of the) academic year. In June 2007 a new draft was discussed. It was decided to

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credit points which keep the same value across programmes and countries, which was also part of its initial objectives'. Retrieved 06-10-2018: <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/3550/discussion-note-future-ecvet.pdf>

<sup>347</sup> European University Association (EUA), *The Lisbon Declaration Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a common purpose*. Brussels, 13 April 200, item 8, 3.

<sup>348</sup> *London Communiqué of 18 May 2007, Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world*.

<sup>349</sup> See in this respect: Universities UK, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England. Final report of the Burgess Group*. It contains an annex D, commissioned by the Burgess Group from the Europe Unit of Universities UK, entitled: 'Note from the UK Higher Education Europe Unit: Guidance on articulation between the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the UK's credit systems'. London: Universities UK, December 2006, 40-48. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2006/proposals-for-national-arrangements-use-academic-credit-in-he-england.pdf>

<sup>350</sup> Europe Unit Universities UK, *Europe Note*, London 20 July 2009 meant for Vice Chancellors, Heads of Institutions, European/International Office and Academic Registrars. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report\\_July2009\\_UKHEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report_July2009_UKHEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf)

establish a small group to draft a one-page proposal for revised ECTS key features. The group consisted of six members, all of whom were critical of the British position.<sup>351</sup> This one page draft was finished mid-September 2007 and sent for consultation to the BFUG. The Group discussed the draft at their Lisbon meeting on 2-3 October 2007. This resulted in a list of comments, in particular from the UK representation, which were taken on board in the final version of the 'ECTS Key Features' of 21 December 2007.<sup>352</sup>

In the meantime the relations between the EUA and the vast majority of the national ECTS/DS counsellors deteriorated rapidly. At the Lisbon Bologna Follow-up Group meeting the EUA suggested to take the range of 1500 to 1800 hours out of the Key Features. This point of view came as a complete surprise, alien as it was to the position of the counsellors group. In addition, the EUA challenged the position of the European Commission as the institution responsible for ECTS. On 5 November 2007 it stated the following on its website:

'The EUA Council held an important discussion on the future development of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) during its meeting in Wroclaw, Poland on October 24th 2007. Currently the European Commission is undertaking a review of the ECTS reference documents (ECTS Key Features and Users' Guide) to bring them in line with developments in the Bologna Process and to make ECTS a more effective tool in the context of lifelong learning. The EUA Council emphasised that the voice of universities and students must be heard in this debate, as EUA has committed in the Lisbon Declaration that "*universities wish to take a leading role in the further development of ECTS*". This follows the findings of Trends V and *Bologna with student eyes* that, although ECTS is being increasingly used throughout Europe's universities, considerable difficulties are being experienced in the implementation of the system. (...) EUA is particularly concerned to ensure that clear guidelines are provided to universities both on the different purposes of ECTS, and on measures to ensure proper implementation. With such guidelines in place, universities will be able to take full responsibility for using the system well and for further developing it to respond to emerging challenges. EUA is thus fully committed to the development of this vital European credit system.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Its members were all involved in the Tuning project: Volker Gehmlich, Maria Sticchi-Damiani, Raimonda Markeviciene, Julia González, Robert Wagenaar and Caroline Carlot (ESIB/ESU).

<sup>352</sup> Document ECTS Key Features (1 October 2007). The documents offers an overview of the draft key competences, the comments and amendments proposed and the reaction and conclusion proposed of the European Commission

<sup>353</sup> European University Association (EUA) Website, News page. Enhancing the implementation of ECTS, 5 November 2007. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: [http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/07-11-05/Enhancing\\_the\\_implementation\\_of\\_ECTS.aspx](http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/07-11-05/Enhancing_the_implementation_of_ECTS.aspx). See also the European University Association (EUA), *The Lisbon Declaration. Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a Common Purpose*, which includes as point 8 ECTS the following section:

From the e-mail correspondence at the time, it can be learned that the message was not well received by the ECTS counsellors group, which the EUA expected to coordinate on the basis of a service contract of the European Commission following a call for an ‘information project on higher education reform’. In its tender document, the EUA had stated that it ‘will work in partnership with EURASHE, ESIB, EAIE and Tuning’.<sup>354</sup> EUA’s explicit request to the European Commission to take over the responsibility for ECTS was turned down by the Commission, as was to be expected. It was the second time the EUA made an effort, following a much more cautious attempt in 2002, which was related to the Zürich conference on ECTS. The move had the opposite effect of what the EUA had aimed for.

EUA’s argument for taking over the responsibility for ECTS was rather awkward. According to EUA representatives, implementation of ECTS in many institutions led to overloading students’ workload. The impression of the counsellors was exactly the opposite. Where ECTS was implemented correctly, the student workload was feasible. It were the universities in many countries that were the real problem, with staff not sufficiently acquainted with and experienced in applying a student workload based system. In particular for those institutions that had founded their administration and calculation of staff time (and therefore appointments) on actual contact or teaching hours, as in the case of the US Carnegie system, the transfer to another system proved to be very challenging. In countries which had a longer tradition with the use of student workload based credit systems, like the United Kingdom, Ireland, Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries, feasibility was not experienced as an issue. It underpinned and confirmed the argument that the existing model of support, – a pool of international counsellors coordinated by a body or institution that had the financial capacity to fund it -, was the best (continued) way forward. It was also not by accident that in the setting of Tuning an approach for calculating student workload was developed, which was applied as training material for the counsellors – now Bologna Experts – group.<sup>355</sup>

In retrospect it seems that the EUA mixed up general resistance against the Bologna Process in a number of countries with the implementation of ECTS.

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‘Universities wish to take a leading role in the further development of ECTS. EUA will take up the challenge as part of its continued support to universities in implementing the Bologna Process reforms through the Bologna Handbook and the organization of dedicated seminars and other events’. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: [http://www.eua.be/Libraries/quality-assurance/lisbon\\_declaration.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.eua.be/Libraries/quality-assurance/lisbon_declaration.pdf?sfvrsn=0)

<sup>354</sup> European University Website (EUA) Website, Information Project on Higher Education Reform: Call to Host an Event, 24 February 2006. Retrieved on 2 July 2018 from: [http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/06-02-24/Information\\_Project\\_on\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Reform\\_Call\\_to\\_Host\\_an\\_Event.aspx](http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/06-02-24/Information_Project_on_Higher_Education_Reform_Call_to_Host_an_Event.aspx)

<sup>355</sup> Bologna Experts’ Conference “Putting Bologna into Practice the Experts’. Training Material. Brussels, July 2007.

Criticisms regarding the Bologna Process are shortly discussed in chapter 2, *The Bologna Process on the March*. Or, as the counsellors suspected, the EUA management had proved to be rather sensitive to the UK lobby.<sup>356</sup> This suspicion was fed by the fact that EUA policy officer Michel Hoerig proposed to stretch the hours range from 1300 (instead of 1500) to 1800 for a normal academic year.<sup>357</sup> This was the more remarkable because in September 2007 the authoritative Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published the results of a survey which showed that the teaching and study time of English students was lower per week (typically 25 hours) than in countries on the continent (varying from 30-35 per week). Naturally this survey received media attention; in *The Guardian* under the witty heading 'Time Bomb'.<sup>358</sup>

The clash between EUA and counsellors had as a side effect that the constructive cooperation between the EUA and Tuning terminated. From 2008 onward the EUA acted towards Tuning as a competitor instead of a comrade in arms, very much to the regret of the Tuning team. It would be many years before relations were normalized again. The affair also had an impact on the cooperation between the EUA and the European Commission. From 2002 to 2004 the EUA coordinated the ECTS/DS counsellors and from 2004 to 2007 the national teams of Bologna promoters. During these years the number of counsellors grew to some 350, now also including representatives of the new EU member states.<sup>359</sup> As a result the level of experience of the members of the group became rather uneven. This was a good argument to keep the pool in place, which would allow for collegial training. The direct involvement of the EUA in the development and promotion of ECTS (and the Bologna Process in general) came to an end with a major Bologna Experts' Conference, held in Brussels on 2-3 July 2007 entitled: "Putting Bologna into Practice – the Experts' contribution" - a message not picked up by the EUA, as has been outlined above. The content of the Brussels conference was organized by the European Commission in close cooperation with Bologna Experts and technically supported by the EUA.<sup>360</sup> Nevertheless, it is fair to stipulate that the EUA did a marvellous job in the years it was responsible for 'training' the vast growing group of counsellors/promoters. In December 2007 the European Commission assigned

<sup>356</sup> This can be derived from the e-mail correspondence between the coordinators of the national teams of Bologna promoters in the period October – November 2007.

<sup>357</sup> E-mail correspondence between members expert group about the ECTS users' guide suggestions. 17 November 2007.

<sup>358</sup> Donald MacLeod, *Time bomb*, in: *The Guardian*, 25 September 2007. Article retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/sep/25/students.highereducation>

<sup>359</sup> European University Association (EUA), *Annual report 2007, Bologna promoters – information Project on higher Education reform*. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: [http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/EUA\\_2007\\_annual\\_report\\_final.pdf?sfvrsn=4](http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/EUA_2007_annual_report_final.pdf?sfvrsn=4)

<sup>360</sup> 'Putting Bologna into Practice the Experts' contribution. Bologna Experts' Conference, July 2007'. Conference materials: Reader and Training Material Brochure.

the service contract to UNICA – Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe. It would run the project and its activities successfully until the summer of 2013 with support of the Brussels Education Services.<sup>361</sup> These activities were the preparation of information materials, two training sessions per year and facilitating networking between the Bologna experts.

In any case, the intervention of the EUA came (too) late, because the European Commission had already contracted GHK Consulting to ‘centralise the drafting process’ of the new edition of the Users’ Guide on the basis of an expert group of 11 members selected by the Commission, of which three represented respectively EUA, EURASHE and ESU (formerly ESIB). The others were Bologna Experts, seven of whom played a (leading) role in Tuning.<sup>362</sup> It was agreed that the updated Users’ Guide would be based on the draft ECTS Key Features presented to the October Bologna Follow-Up Group in Lisbon and a previous draft discussed in June 2007. The Key Features were finalized in December 2007 as mentioned above, before the activities of the drafting group started at the beginning of 2008. The work to be done was divided over the counsellors, since they were the content experts.

## Renewed interest for ECTS

Before the new edition of the ECTS Users’ Guide was published in 2009, and as input to the Leuven-Louvain Bologna Follow-up Conference in the same year, three official Bologna Seminars were organized related to ECTS. The first one, ‘Learning Outcomes Based Higher Education – The Scottish Experience’ (Edinburgh 21-22 February 2008), can be perceived as a follow-up of the conference ‘Using Learning Outcomes’ organized four years earlier also in Edinburgh. For the 2008 seminar Stephen Adam had updated his 2004 report.<sup>363</sup> It endorsed the proposition that ‘learning outcomes are the basic building blocks of the Bologna package of educational reforms’, being the key to the paradigm

<sup>361</sup> Service contracts ‘Information Project on Higher Education Reform II and III’.

<sup>362</sup> Full membership of the group, invited and appointed by the European Commission: Stephen Adam, Volker Gehmlich, Henri Luchan, John Reilly, Julia González, Maria Sticchi-Damiani, Raimonda Markeviciene, Robert Wagenaar, Sandra Kraze (EURASHE), Michel Hoerig (EUA), Caroline Carlot (ESU). GHK Consulting Ltd was represented by Daniela Ulicna who acted as coordinator. Peter van der Hijden and Christian Tauch supervised activities on behalf of the European Commission.

<sup>363</sup> Stephen Adam, UK Bologna Expert, *Learning Outcomes current developments in Europe: Update on the issues and applications of Learning Outcomes associated with the Bologna Process*. Bologna Seminar: Learning outcomes based higher education: the Scottish experience 21 – 22 February 2008, at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland. Report retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: [http://www.unica-network.eu/sites/default/files/ECVET\\_Edinburgh\\_Fe08\\_Adams.pdf](http://www.unica-network.eu/sites/default/files/ECVET_Edinburgh_Fe08_Adams.pdf)



shift from teacher to student-centred learning. There was agreement at the seminar that ‘it was unhelpful to counterpoise learning outcomes and workload, since both elements are important in the use of ECTS’. It recommended to define learning outcomes at ‘threshold level’ not ‘average’ or ‘modal’ level to allow for smooth recognition. Two months later the seminar ‘ECTS based on Learning Outcomes and Student Workload’ took place in Moscow (17-18 April). It formulated 9 conclusions which can be read as challenges and as action points. Among them was the need for Common terminology to have clarity about the meaning of key concepts. Key stakeholders were asked to recognize the cultural shift required to move to the output-oriented approach. Furthermore, it was stressed that quality assurance procedures ‘must address the use of ECTS based on student workload and learning outcomes’. In this context ‘proper implementation of ECTS’ was seen ‘as a fundamental tool for planning curricula and enhancing quality and transparency’.<sup>364</sup>

The largest of the three seminars on ECTS and Learning Outcomes was hosted by the Portuguese Directorate-General for Higher Education in Porto (19-20 June 2008), entitled ‘Development of a Common Understanding of Learning Outcomes and ECTS’. It was attended by 137 delegates from 31 countries. The seminar was broadcast live on streaming video. The seminar was based on 3 topics and related key notes delivered by Declan Kennedy, Robert Wagenaar and Volker Gehmlich.<sup>365</sup> For the conference 10 conclusions plus concrete recommendations were defined for the Bologna Follow-up Group, the higher education institutions and their representative bodies as well as relevant national authorities/ministries. A decade later, the sets of conclusions and recommendations are still highly relevant. There is an obvious and understandable overlap/ repetition of the conclusions of the other two seminars, but their formulation is much more comprehensive. In its first conclusion it is stressed that the ‘shift to ECTS and learning outcomes requires a great deal of work’. It defines what this means very clearly: ‘Support and training for staff in developing, writing and assessing Learning Outcomes is essential and this needs commitment at the highest level, including from heads of institutions and from ministers’. It speaks of the role of stakeholders, ECTS as a planning tool, workload and feasibility, the outcomes of

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<sup>364</sup> ‘ECTS based on Learning Outcomes and Student Workload’ Moscow, 17-18 April. Conclusions. Bologna Seminar co-organized by the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia together with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the National Training Foundation and the Council of Europe. Retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: [http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2007\\_09/sem07\\_09/ECTS\\_moscow/index.htm](http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2007_09/sem07_09/ECTS_moscow/index.htm)

<sup>365</sup> Keynote Lecture 1: Declan Kennedy (University College Cork), ‘Everything you always wanted to know about Learning Outcomes!’, Keynote lecture 2: Robert Wagenaar (University of Groningen), ‘Learning Outcomes and ECTS: indispensable elements for teaching, learning and assessment in present day degree programmes?’, Keynote 3: Volker Gehmlich (Fachhochschule Osnabrück), ‘The wider implications of the European Qualifications Frameworks’.

learning as a wider concept than learning outcomes covering also unintended/unplanned learning and the necessary alignment of ECTS with other parts of the Bologna Architecture. The 10<sup>th</sup> and final conclusion stipulates that ‘subject and discipline LO developed in international cooperation such as Tuning can be most useful in translating the generic LO on European and national/ regional level into LO on the level of programmes and modules.’<sup>366</sup>

Although the seminars offered an excellent overview of the debate at the time, not much of it can be traced in the Leuven-Louvain Ministerial Communiqué (2009). It does not say more than that ‘the Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and recognition’. It does highlight the role of academics, however, who ‘in close cooperation with students and employer representatives, will continue to develop learning outcomes and international reference points’, a clear reference to the work of Tuning. The attention had indeed shifted to the student-centred approach as the remedy for reform.

It is interesting to note that the new edition of the ECTS Users’ Guide was taken for granted. It was published on 6 February 2009, three months before the Ministerial Conference. The Guide built on the previous edition of 2004/5. As stated in its introduction, recent developments in the Bologna Process had been taken into account, such as the growing importance of lifelong learning, the role of qualifications frameworks and increasing use of the concept of learning outcomes. Stakeholder associations, Member States’ experts and the Bologna Follow-up Group had been consulted in its production. The guide distinguishes its role as a tool, its use and its application. It stipulates that it is meant to serve all types of programmes, whatever the mode of delivery, learner status and type of learning (formal, non-formal and informal). The Guide is well written and comprehensive, with 36 pages for its 8 chapters. The 5 annexes, covering another 24 pages, offer additional information. Annex five shows an ‘Overview of the national regulations on the number of learning hours per academic year’. Contrary to the situation in 2002, the vast majority of countries had now fixed this number in legislation. In all countries the number of hours per ECTS credit is between 25 and 30 (implying 1500-1800 hours per academic year), the only exceptions are Ireland and the UK with 20 hours per ECTS credit. The handy format as well as its size met the expectations, as, it seems, did the content.<sup>367</sup>

Again the odd men out were Ireland and the UK. UK Universities noted in its *Europe Note* of 20 July 2009 with some satisfaction that in the 2009 version

<sup>366</sup> Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland, Rapporteur and Sebastião Feyo de Azevedo, Chairman Organizing Committee, Bologna Seminar on ‘Development of a Common Understanding of Learning Outcomes and ECTS’, Porto, 19-20 June 2008. Final Report and Recommendations.

<sup>367</sup> European Commission, *ECTS Users’ Guide*. Brussels, 6 February 2009. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European communities, 2009.

no limits were placed on the number of ECTS credits to be awarded per calendar year. However, it realized that the inclusion of annex five mentioned above did not improve its situation. In the Note, it questioned the reliability of the 'formal' information about the workload per country. It tried at length to make the argument that there was the 'danger of focusing on student workload in isolation from learning outcomes'. In its defence, it took the line of thinking of ECVET by stating that: 'Credits points provide a measure for describing the achievements of designated learning outcomes at a specific level. One UK credit point represents the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by the average learner at the relevant level of 10 hours of notional hours of learning. Credit is a measure of the volume of the outcomes, not of actual study time'. A remarkable conclusion which made the argument a *contradictio in terminis*. It should cover the fact that probably UK practice to equate one ECTS credit with two UK credits was not quite accurate. Indeed what can be observed is that the conversion of UK credits led to issues in continental Europe. The UK position that the full calendar Master qualifications of 180 UK credits equals 90 ECTS continues to be challenged. They do not give access to doctoral programmes in many EU countries.<sup>368</sup>

What is new in the 2009 guide is the ECTS Grading Table. It is in practice a simplified version of the ECTS grading scales applied so far, as the following table shows.

*Table: 30 Years of ECTS: 30 years of debate about Grading / Grading Scale / Grading Table*

1990-1992	1993-2004	2004-2009	2009-today
Percentages	Percentages + Qualifications	Percentages	Percentages
1 = best 25% 2 = next 25% 3 = next 25% 4 = final 25% of successful students	A = best 10% = Excellent B = next 25% = Very Good C = next 30% = Good D = next 25% = Satisfactory E = final 10% = Sufficient (of successful students) FX = Fail F = Fail	A = best 10% B = next 25% C = next 30% D = next 25% E = final 10% (of successful students) FX = Fail F = Fail	Grade distribution according to a national system, expressed in % of successful students (based on defined reference group: ISCED-F classification)

<sup>368</sup> UK Universities, *Europe Note*. London, 20 July 2009, 3-6. Retrieved on 3 July 2018 from: [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report\\_July2009\\_UK-HEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report_July2009_UK-HEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf)

The table introduced in 2009 is the outcome of about 20 years of intense debate between experts, in which in particular Terence Karran and Richard de Lavigne played a prominent role.<sup>369</sup> In these discussions, it was widely acknowledged that countries had quite different grading cultures, with some countries not using their national grading scale to the full, such as France and the Netherlands, while others awarded grades belonging to the upper part of their national grading scale. Initiatives to develop a pan-European or unified grading scale proved not to be successful. A special working group set up for this purpose by the European Commission did not result in a satisfying outcome. Because in practice the ECTS grading scale was not really used, Peter van der Hijden asked Robert Wagenaar, who had been a participant in all discussions about grading conversion in the context of ECTS, to come up with a model that would have better chances for success.

Wagenaar's analysis was that the present grading scale required two actions: first the collection of data about grade distribution in a programme or course, followed by the conversion of this distribution by grouping them in percentage groups. He concluded that this last step was redundant, because it did not lead to additional information. To the contrary, it simplified information for no reason. His solution was that each grade be accompanied by the percentage of that grade awarded to the group of peers. In the note he prepared, he explained what the criteria should be for establishing this reference group. To catch the grading culture of a programme or department it might be even sufficient to offer the grade distribution as part of the national/local grading scale and to include this in the Diploma Supplement. After some editing by Maria Sticchi-Damiani this proposal was included in annex 3 of the *Users' Guide*. It inspired a consortium of universities, EGRACONS (European Grading Conversion System), coordinated by the University of Ghent, to come up with an online conversion tool, based on this new model.<sup>370</sup>

Was the conversion of grades perceived as a major challenge, the use of ECTS as a transfer and an accumulation system based on the student-centred approach proved to be one as well. This can be derived from the outcomes of the Commission's initiative to award ECTS labels (besides Diploma Supplement labels) for successful implementation. Already in 2002 the European Commission launched as part of its information campaign the awarding of labels to stimulate both the use of ECTS and DS. At the time three criteria were defined, which still focused

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<sup>369</sup> Terence Karran, Pan-European Grading Scales: Lessons from National Systems and the ECTS, in: *Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. 30, No. 1, April 2005; Long e-mail sent by Richard de Lavigne to colleagues, dated 13 December 2012, offering some thought on the grading conversion issue.

<sup>370</sup> European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide 2009*, 41-43; EGRACONS Website: <http://egracons.eu>

on ECTS as a transfer mechanism: an institutional Information Package/Course Catalogue in English and, if different, the national language; a correct allocation of credits according to student workload measured in time and the obligatory use of the ECTS tools.<sup>371</sup> 91 Higher education institutions applied of which only 11 met the criteria. The ECTS label, for the first time awarded in 2004, had a validity of three years. In 2005 another 10 higher education institutions obtained the ECTS label, not a very impressive number given the number of higher education institutions that received EU financial support to implement ECTS.<sup>372</sup> Publishing a complete Course Catalogue in English proved to be an insurmountable obstacle for many institutions. The label was re-launched in 2008 and awarded from 2009 again until 2013.

The number of institutions meeting the requirements continued to be rather disappointing. In the years 2009 and 2010 28 labels were awarded and the years 2011 and 2012 37. In 2013 another 25 higher education institutions, in particular from Turkey, obtained the label. Part of these labels were renewals.<sup>373</sup> Although the 2009 edition of the ECTS Users' Guide seemed to be an adequate description of the state of thinking regarding a student-centred /outcome based credit system, in the year directly preceding the next Bologna Follow-up conference to be held in Bucharest in 2012, the notion developed that there was further room for improvement. It seemed inspired by lack of progress made by higher education institutions to actually give substance to the implementation of the reforms. It also shows the incapability of the Bologna Follow-Up Group to give sufficient leadership to the desired reforms. This frustration resulted in the Bucharest Communiqué, in which the mixing up of EU responsibilities and those of the Bologna signatory countries is remarkable.

Contrary to the London (2007) and the Leuven-Louvain Communiqués (2009), the Bucharest Communiqué devotes a lot of attention to ECTS as core

<sup>371</sup> European Commission, SOCRATES – ERASMUS Special measures for the promotion of ECTS and DS. Brussels, 2 December 2002. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: <http://eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EC%20doc%20on%20the%20promotion%20of%20ECTS-%20DS.1068807686692.pdf>; See for the label criteria: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Key Features. 11.02.03. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: <http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/ECTS%20Key%20Features.1068807879166.pdf>

<sup>372</sup> European Commission, Press release: 11 Higher Education Institutions receive the ECTS Label during the First European Seminar for Bologna promoters. (IP/04/1376). Brussels, 17 November 2004; European Commission, *From Bergen to London. The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process*. Brussels, 7 May 2007. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: [http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2005\\_07/Position\\_pap\\_Consult\\_memb/FromBergentoLondonEC7May2007.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2005_07/Position_pap_Consult_memb/FromBergentoLondonEC7May2007.pdf)

<sup>373</sup> European Commission, *Excellence in Europe's Universities. ECTS and Diploma Supplement Holders 2009 & 2010. Make Mobility a Reality*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010; European Commission, *ECTS and Diploma Supplement Label Holders 2011 & 2012. Internationalisation in Europe's universities*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014; European Commission, *Erasmus – Celebrating ECTS and Diploma Supplement Label Holders 2009-2013*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

element for reform: ‘we must make further efforts to consolidate and build on progress’. It stresses the need ‘for more coherence between our policies, especially in completing the transition to the three cycle system, the use of ECTS credits, the issuing of Diploma Supplements, the enhancement of quality assurance and the implementation of qualifications frameworks, including the definition and evaluation of learning outcomes’. A key section is the following:

“To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent. We call on institutions to further link study credits with both learning outcomes and student workload, and to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures. We will work to ensure that the ECTS Users’ Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning”. It identifies as two out of a total of 20 (!) priorities in the years up to the next ministerial Bologna Follow-up Conference, to be held in Yerevan in 2015:

- Ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes;
- Work to ensure that the ECTS Users’ Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning.<sup>374</sup>

By formulating it in this way, the ownership of ECTS was once again challenged, this time not by the EUA but by the ‘Bologna’ countries. Contrary to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA, ECTS was not a product of the Bologna Process, but one of the EU. Was it due to the inexperience of the new team at the European Commission responsible for the EU policy agenda in higher education? Whatever the case may be, contrary to previous years, the members of the ‘working group of practitioners’ were appointed by the Bologna countries and stakeholder associations. The group counted 21 members of which 3 originated from outside the EU and 4 represented the associations. Six experts had been part of the working group responsible for the 2009 edition.<sup>375</sup> It is remarkable that the UK had a representation of three members, while other countries only had one. The Commission positioned itself as coordinator of the drafting and consultation

<sup>374</sup> Bucharest Communiqué 2012 – Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area. Bucharest, 2012.

<sup>375</sup> These members were: Volker Gehmlich, Sandra Kraze (EURASHE), Raimonda Markeviciene, John Reilly, Maria Sticchi Damiani and Robert Wagenaar. Most of the editing work was done by Maria Sticchi Damiani, Raimonda Markeviciene and the European Commission policy official Klara Engels-Perenyi. The group was coordinated by Adam Tyson, head of unit/ acting director at the EU Directorate General Education and Culture.

process. The same phrasing as used in the 2009 Guide, but with the crucial difference that in that guide the Commission expressed explicitly its responsibility for the ‘final wording’ of the Guide. The 2015 edition states in its introduction: ‘the Guide has been adopted by Ministers for Higher Education of the European Higher Education Area in 2015 at the Yerevan ministerial conference. It is therefore the official Guide for the use of ECTS’.<sup>376</sup> This implied that the Commission allowed it to become an official EHEA document and tool, which it had not been before and was alien to its path of development. It was an interesting policy move indeed.

The wish of the EHEA member countries was to make the *ECTS Users’ Guide* the core instrument for making the paradigm shift to student-centred learning and teaching. This had to be established by focusing more on ECTS as a means for programme design, delivery and monitoring, including instructions on how to write programme learning outcomes. In this Guide a separate chapter is devoted to this topic. As could be expected, in the working group a discussion took place about the balance between workload and learning outcomes and the role of time as part of the learning process. The phrase, ‘in most cases, workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work’, remained part of the key features. The overview of credit ranges per country was no longer included, because it no longer had a purpose. In general, it was decided not to make changes to the key features, although those included in the 2015 edition offer more detail than the previous version (see the annex to this chapter). The role of learning outcomes is strengthened in the definition of credits: ‘ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload’. The 2009 edition states that ‘ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes’. A subtle difference. The Guide is more user friendly and better designed than its predecessor. It offers more and better explanations and tailored examples; examples concerning programme profiles and programme learning outcomes, unit or module learning outcomes and grade conversion. It also contains an extensive and very useful glossary.<sup>377</sup> It is fair to conclude that the final product met the expectations and was well received.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> European Commission, *ECTS Users’ Guide 2015*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, 7.

<sup>377</sup> Ibidem. The Guide holds 105 pages of which some 40 are reserved for annexes.

<sup>378</sup> An exception in this respect is Declan Kennedy, author of the publication *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes. A Practical Guide*. Cork: University College Cork, 2007. See: Declan Kennedy and Marian McCarthy, Learning Outcomes in the ECTS Users’ Guide 2015, in: *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*. Issue 3, Berlin: DUZ Verlags- und Medienhaus GmbH, 2016, 1-14. The publication seems to be part of a quest against Tuning. Earlier publications by the same author (Kennedy): D. Kennedy, A. Hylan, N. Ryan, Learning Outcomes and competences,

The sensitive issue of sub-levels within cycles which go beyond the European and National Qualifications Frameworks is not discussed in the *Users' Guide 2015*, nor was it in previous ones. As in the case of the 2009 edition the attention is limited to progression routing and related rules, essential elements for a credit accumulation system. The topic was seriously discussed, however, as part of the Tuning *Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and Arts (HUMART)* project (2010-2011)<sup>379</sup> and further elaborated in the setting of the recent *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe (CALOHEE)* project (2016-2018). The CALOHEE project resulted in a sound and robust solution by applying three sub-levels within both the first and the second cycle (Bachelor and Master). The model is outlined in chapter 10, *Developing a new strategy for defining and measuring what is needed: Agreeing common ground*.

## In conclusion

In the previous chapter the establishment, pilot phasing and rolling out of ECTS as a European transfer system was discussed. As part of this development a number of key moments were identified. The next key moment was the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), followed up by the Bologna Declaration (1999). Both were a clear indicator that the modernisation and reform of the higher education sector and institutions reflected in their study programmes was felt to be needed to meet the challenges of a growing global competition. It triggered the idea of Lifelong Learning, which would require a different type of credit system: a system not only applicable for transfer, but also for the accumulation of credits. Although the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project of 1999/2000 did not come up with a clear action plan, it did define the challenge. This challenge was transformed in 2000 in the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project. It prepared in turn the pathway for accepting the idea of accumulation of credits by higher education institutions at the EUA Zürich Conference of October 2002. It served also as a good basis for the preparation of the new *Users' Guide 2004/5*, which was based on the Tuning project outcomes. In its combination, the Zürich Con-

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in: E. Froment, J. Kohler, L. Purser, L. Wilson, eds., *EUA Bologna Handbook – Making Bologna Work*. Berlin: Raabe, 2009, 1-18; Andy Gibbs, Declan Kennedy, Anthony Vickers, Learning Outcomes, Degree Profiles, Tuning Project and Competences. In: *Journal of the European Higher Education Area. Policy, Practice and Institutional Engagement*. No. 1, 2012, 71-87. The contributions do not express deep knowledge and understanding of the scholarly and public debate about the concept of competency based learning since 1995.

<sup>379</sup> Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010 – 2011. Bilbao-Groningen, 2012. Retrieved from the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe Website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/sqf-humanities-and-arts.html>



ference and the new edition of the Users' Guide was another key moment in the development of ECTS. Again a relatively small group of academics took the lead, which over time had become real experts as *connaisseurs* and promoters of the ECTS brand. All of them had their roots in the ECTS Pilot Scheme.

These key moments are reflected in the name, not in its acronym ECTS. What started as the European Community Course Credit Transfer System, was simplified to European Credit Transfer System in 1995 and transformed into the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System in 2002. After 2002, ECTS was further developed as a result of the strong cooperation between Tuning, the EUA and the European Commission. Essential in this cooperation was the focus on student-centred learning, which was only embraced by the Bologna Follow-up Group from 2007. This was the year when the key features were evaluated and rephrased without changing their essence. They reflect the stronger emphasis on the concept of learning outcomes as an essential component for a credit accumulation system.

Over time ECTS led to the creation of a substantial group of experts, consisting of an international group and national Helplines, who developed a deep understanding of processes not only related to student mobility but also to curriculum reform. From the adoption of the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations it was very clear that reforms at national level were required to offer European higher education a future in a globalising society. It is not to bold to defend the position that without the ERASMUS, but most of all the ECTS experience, there would not have been a Bologna Process. The same applies to the role of Tuning in relation to the transformation of ECTS into a transfer and accumulation system. Without the Tuning experience there would not be ECTS as we know it today.

In terms of reflection, training of counsellors as well as dissemination of the successive 'Quality Enhancement' (1995-96) and 'Quality Appraisal in ECTS' (1997-2001, both coordinated by Richard Whewell and the ECTS Counselling and Site Visit Programme (2001-2004) and the Information Project on Higher Education Reform I (2004-2007) coordinated by the EUA, played a key role. In 2007 this role was taken over by the university network UNICA which continued to offer a framework for the training of Bologna promoters and a platform for the exchange of information. It was all financed by the European Commission. Since 2013 a European structure is absent and half of the EU countries have lost their national team of Bologna promoters. Although there is an up-to-date Users Guide (2015) this seems to be an insufficient instrument for implementing ECTS further according to the principles of a student-centred approach. It seems that the European Commission gave in too easily to the signatories of the Bologna Declaration to make promotion and further implementation of ECTS a national responsibility. As we know now, many countries have not carried out that re-

sponsibility sufficiently well, and as a result undermined the stability of the whole endeavour. It remains to be seen whether the political choice of the European Commission to make the EHEA countries responsible for the latest edition of the Users' Guide (2015) will pay off. Since 2015 no serious progress has been made. The disappointing number of ECTS labels awarded in the period 2004-2014 shows that ECTS implementation and use require serious effort.

In retrospect, it is remarkable that from around 2002 countries started to include ECTS in their national legislation, turning it from a voluntary applied credit reference system into an official – national – one. The many Bologna Seminars, Leiria, Zürich, Edinburgh, Moscow and Porto were instrumental in boosting the importance of having a robust overarching credit transfer and accumulation system. It is interesting to note that in particular one country, the UK, showed by far the most interest in the development of ECTS from the turn of the century. Although it never indicated that it wanted to adopt the ECTS system at national level, it lobbied intensively with respect to its rules, the ECTS Key Features. While other countries had something to win, the UK had much to lose: the status of its full year (12 months) Master programme. The country and its higher education institutions and experts dominated the debate during the period 2000-2015. This astonished the group of ECTS counsellors and promoters, in particular when the EUA seemed to be receptive to the UK position and arguments. By playing down or even denying the factor time in the learning process by in practice promoting the ECVET approach – credits reflect learning outcomes only -, the UK tried to undermine deliberately the foundation of ECTS out of pure self-interest. It did not succeed.

Over time, a core group of less than 5 different European Commission officers and less than 10 academics, supported actively by many, many others, were able to turn a bold idea into reality, that is a sustainable European transfer and accumulation credit system based on the notions of student workload and learning outcomes, which today is a world standard. This is an outcome that could only be dreamed of 30 years ago when the first steps were made. It shows that a limited number of people can indeed make a difference.

## Annex: ECTS Key Features over time

1990	1995/ 1998	2004	2009	2015
<p><b>ECTS definition</b> ECTS, the European Community Course Credit Transfer System, is based on the principle of mutual trust and confidence between participating higher education institutions. The few rules of ECTS, concerning Information (on courses available), Agreement (between the home and the host institutions) and the Use of Credit Points (to indicate student workload) are set to reinforce mutual trust and confidence. Each ECTS department describes the courses it offers not only in terms of content but also adding the indication of credits to each course.</p>	<p><b>ECTS definition</b> ECTS provides an instrument to create transparency, to build bridges between institutions and to widen the choices available to students. The system makes it easier for institutions to recognize the learning achievements of students through the use of commonly understood measures – credits and grades – and it also provides a means to interpret national systems of higher education. The ECTS system is based on three core elements: information (on study programmes and student achievement), mutual agreement (between the partner</p>	<p><b>ECTS definition</b> The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, objectives preferably specified in terms of the learning outcomes and competences to be acquired.</p>	<p><b>ECTS definition</b> ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to facilitate planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility. ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied to other lifelong learning activities.</p>	<p><b>ECTS definition</b> ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning.</p>

<p><b>1990</b></p> <p><b>ECTS credits</b> In ECTS, 60 credits represent the workload of a year of study; normally 30 credits are given for a semester and 20 credits for a term. It is important that no special courses be set up for ECTS purposes, but all ECTS courses be mainstream courses of the participating institutions, as followed by home students under normal regulations.</p>	<p><b>1995/ 1998</b></p> <p><b>ECTS credits</b> In ECTS, 60 credits represent the workload of an academic year of study and normally 30 credits for a semester and 20 credits for a term.</p>	<p><b>2004</b></p> <p><b>ECTS credits</b> ECTS is based on the principle that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. The student workload of a full-time study programme in Europe amounts in most cases to around 1500-1800 hours per year and in those cases one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours.</p>	<p><b>2009</b></p> <p><b>ECTS credits</b> 60 ECTS credits are attached to the workload of a full-time year of formal learning (academic year) and the associated learning outcomes. In most cases, student workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, whereby one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work.</p>	<p><b>2015</b></p> <p><b>ECTS credits</b> ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent, which normally comprises a number of educational components to which credits (on the basis of the learning outcomes and workload) are allocated. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.</p>
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1990			<p><b>2004</b></p> <p><b>Learning outcomes</b> Credits in ECTS can only be obtained after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved. Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do after completion of a process of learning, long or short.</p>	<p><b>2009</b></p> <p><b>Learning outcomes</b> ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks.</p>	<p><b>2015</b></p> <p><b>Learning outcomes</b> Learning outcomes are statements of what the individual knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The achievement of learning outcomes has to be assessed through procedures based on clear and transparent criteria. Learning outcomes are attributed to individual educational components and to programmes at a whole. They are also used in European and national qualifications frameworks to describe the level of the individual qualification.</p>
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<p><b>1990</b></p> <p><b>Workload</b> ECTS credits are a value allocated to course units to describe the students' workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work each course requires in relation to the total quantity of work required to complete a full year of academic study at the institution: that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, private work – in the library or at home – and examinations and other assessment activities. ECTS credits express a relative value, with respect to one year's total workload.</p>	<p><b>1995/ 1998</b></p> <p><b>Workload</b> ECTS credits are a relative rather than an absolute measure of student workload. They only specify how much of a year's workload a course unit represents at the institution or department allocating the credits.</p>	<p><b>2004</b></p> <p><b>Workload</b> Student workload in ECTS consists of the time required to complete all planned learning activities such as attending lectures, seminars, independent and private study, preparation of projects, examinations, and so forth.</p>	<p><b>2009</b></p> <p><b>Workload</b> Workload indicates the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.</p>	<p><b>2015</b></p> <p><b>Workload</b> Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. The correspondence of the full-time workload of an academic year to 60 credits is often formalised by national legal provisions. In most cases, workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work. It should be recognised that this represents the typical workload and that for individual students the actual time to achieve the learning outcomes will vary.</p>
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1990	1995/ 1998	2004	2009	2015
<p><b>Allocation of credits</b> It is up to the participating institutions to subdivide the credits for the different courses. Practical placements and optional courses which form an integral part of the courses of study also receive academic credit. Non-credit courses may, however, be mentioned in the transcript of records.</p>	<p><b>Allocation of credits</b> ECTS credits are a numerical value (between 1 and 60) allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at the institution, that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, tutorials, fieldwork, private study – in the library or at home – and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a full student workload and not limited to contact hours only.</p>	<p><b>Allocation of credits</b> Credits are allocated to all educational components of a study programme (such as modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.) and reflect the quantity of work each component requires to achieve its specific objectives or learning outcomes in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study successfully.</p>	<p><b>Allocation of credits</b> Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or study programmes as well as to their educational components (such as modules, course units, dissertation work, work placements and laboratory work). The number of credits ascribed to each component is based on its weight in terms of the workload students need in order to achieve the learning outcomes in a formal context.</p>	<p><b>Allocation of credits</b> Allocation of credits in ECTS is the process of assigning a number of credits to qualifications, degree programmes or single educational components. Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or programmes according to national legislation or practice, where appropriate, and with reference to national and/or European qualifications frameworks. They are allocated to educational components, such as course units, dissertations, work-based learning and work placements, taking as a basis the allocation of 60 credits per full-time academic year, according to the estimated workload required to achieve the defined learning outcomes for each component.</p>

<p><b>1990</b></p> <p><b>Awarding of credits</b> Credits are awarded only when the courses have been completed and all the required examinations have been successfully taken.</p>	<p><b>1995/ 1998</b></p> <p><b>Awarding of credits</b> ECTS credits are allocated to course units but are only awarded to students who successfully complete the course by satisfying the assessment requirements. In other words students do not get credits simply for attending classes or spending time abroad – they must satisfy the assessment regulations specified at the host institution to demonstrate that they fulfilled the stated learning objectives for the course unit. The assessment procedure may take various forms: written or oral examinations, coursework, a combination of the two or other means such as presentations at seminars, information on which should be included in the information package.</p>	<p><b>2004</b></p> <p><b>Awarding of credits</b> (See Learning outcomes)</p>	<p><b>2009</b></p> <p><b>Awarding of credits</b> Credits are awarded to individual students (full-time or part-time) after completion of the learning activities required by a formal programme of study or by a single educational component and the successful assessment of the achieved learning outcomes..</p>	<p><b>2015</b></p> <p><b>Awarding of credits</b> Awarding credits in ECTS is the act of formally granting students and other learners the credits that are assigned to the qualification and/or its components if they achieve the defined learning outcomes. National authorities should indicate which institutions have the right to award ECTS credits. Credits are awarded to individual students after they have completed the required learning activities and achieved the defined learning outcomes, as evidenced by appropriate assessment. If students and other learners have achieved learning outcomes in other formal, non-formal, or informal learning contexts or timeframes, credits may be awarded through assessment and recognition of these learning outcomes.</p>
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1990				2015
			<p><b>Accumulation of credits</b> Credits may be accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications, as decided by the degree-awarding institution. If students have achieved learning outcomes in other learning contexts or timeframes (formal, non-formal or informal), the associated credits may be awarded after successful assessment, validation or recognition of these learning outcomes</p>	<p><b>Accumulation of credits</b> Accumulation of credits in ECTS is the process of collecting credits awarded for achieving the learning outcomes of educational components in formal contexts and for other learning activities carried out in informal and non-formal contexts. A student can accumulate credits in order to: - obtain qualifications, as required by the degree-awarding institution; - document personal achievements for lifelong learning purposes.</p>

1990	1995/ 1998	2004	2009	2015
<p><b>Transfer of credits</b> The students participating in ECTS will receive full credit for all academic work successfully carried out at any of the ECTS partner institutions and they will be able to transfer these academic credits from one participating institution to another on the basis of prior agreement on the content of study programs abroad between students and the institutions involved. (...) When the student has successfully completed the study program previously agreed between the home and the host institutions, and returns to the home institution, credit transfer will then take place, and the student will continue the study course of his/her home institution without any loss of time or credit. If, on the other hand, the student decides to stay at the host institution and to take the degree there, he/she may have to adapt his/her study course due to the legal, institutional and departmental rules in the host country, institution and department.</p>	<p><b>Transfer of credits</b> Home and host institutions prepare and exchange transcripts of records (...) for each student participating in ECTS before and after the period of study abroad. A copy of these transcripts is given to the student for his/her personal file. The home institution recognizes the amount of credits received by their students from partner institutions abroad in respect of specific course units such that the credits for the course unit passed replace the credits which would otherwise have been obtained from the home institution. Thus full academic recognition is given.</p>		<p><b>Transfer of credits</b> Credits awarded in one programme may be transferred into another programme, offered by the same or another institution. This transfer can only take place if the degree-awarding institution recognises the credits and the associated learning outcomes. Partner institutions should agree in advance on the recognition of periods of study abroad.</p>	<p><b>Transfer of credits</b> Transfer of credits is the process of having credits awarded in one context (programme, institution) recognised in another formal context for the purpose of obtaining a qualification. Credits awarded to students in one programme may be transferred from an institution to be accumulated in another programme offered by the same or another institution. Credit transfer is the key to successful study mobility. Institutions, faculties, departments may make agreements which guarantee automatic recognition and transfer of credits.</p>

1990		1995/ 1998		2004		2009		2015	<b>ECTS documentation</b> The use of ECTS credits is facilitated and quality enhanced by the supporting documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Work Placement Certificate). ECTS also contributes to transparency in other documents such as the Diploma Supplement.
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## 5. Competences and Learning Outcomes: A Panacea for Understanding the (New) Role of Higher Education?<sup>380</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*The competence and learning outcomes approach, which intends to improve effective performance of academic staff and students, is becoming dominant in today's higher education. This was quite different some 20 years ago. This contribution aims to offer insight in the reforms initiated and implemented, by posing and answering the questions why the time was appropriate – by identifying and analysing the underlying conditions – and in what way the change was shaped – by focusing on terminology required and approaches developed. Central here is the role the Tuning project – launched in 2000-2001 – played in this respect. The contribution starts with contextualizing the situation in the 1990s: the recession and growing unemployment in many European countries on the one hand and the development of a global society and the challenges the higher educational sector faced at the other. It offers the background for initiating the Tuning project, and the discourse on which its approach is based. In particular, attention is given to choosing the concept of competences, distinguishing subject specific and general/generic ones, as an integrating approach of knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities and attitudes. The approach should serve as a means of integrating a number of main goals as part of the learning and teaching process: strengthening employability and preparing for citizenship besides personal development of the student as a basis for the required educational reform. Tuning's unique contribution is the alignment of this concept to learning outcomes statements as indicators of competence development and achievement and by relating both concepts to profiling of educational programmes.*

### Introduction

In the current debate about higher education the concepts of student centred and active learning, competence development and learning outcomes have obtained a central place. This was quite different when the Bologna Declaration of 1999 was published now nearly 20 years ago. These concepts do not appear in

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<sup>380</sup> This chapter is a revised and updated version of a paper published with the same title in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Competence-based learning: a global perspective. Vol. 1, No.2, May 2014, pp. 279-302.

that document which launched the reform process of higher education in Europe to develop one European Higher Education Area to match one European economic area. At its start the Bologna Process focused on easily readable and comparable degrees, introduction of a two cycle system, establishing a credit system and mobility, cooperation in quality assurance and the promotion of European dimensions. As one of the reasons behind this initiative it mentions explicitly “to promote European citizens employability”, although the document carefully avoids making a direct link to the European economic agenda. Instead it stipulates the importance of a Europe of Knowledge “as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space”.<sup>381</sup>

Four years later at the Bologna Follow-up conference held in Berlin (2003), the European Ministers of Education were much more explicit in confirming that the conclusions of the European Councils in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002) should be taken into account which 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”. The objectives ‘easily readable and comparable degrees and introduction of a two cycle system’ were rephrased as “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”.<sup>382</sup> The rephrasing shows the development in thinking about the role of higher education and the content of its degree programmes. In practice it implied a change of paradigm with wide implications.

The aim of this chapter is to offer insight into this change of paradigm and its implications, by posing and answering the questions why the time was appropriate (by identifying and analysing the underlying conditions) and what way the change was shaped (by focusing on terminology required and approaches developed). Central here is the role the Tuning project – launched in 2000-2001 – played in this respect. Was it a means to understand the (new) role of higher education institutions in today’s world?

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<sup>381</sup> Bologna Declaration 1999 – European Ministers for Higher Education, *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education*. Bologna 19 June 1999. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100210/ministerial-conference-bologna-1999.html>

<sup>382</sup> Berlin Communiqué 2003 – ‘Realising the European Higher Education Area’: Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003 [Berlin Communiqué]. Berlin: Bologna-Berlin2003 Project Team, 2003. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100938/ministerial-conference-berlin-2003.html>

## Context

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century a number of developments coincided which triggered change with regard to the higher education agenda in Europe. Economies, already in recession, slowed down further as a result from the East-Asian financial crisis in 1997 and the Rubel crisis in 1998, preceded by the Mexican crisis of 1995.<sup>383</sup> In 1996 the European Commission stated in a *White Paper on Education and Training* that long term unemployment continued to increase, resulting in the spread of social exclusion, particularly among young people.<sup>384</sup>

At the same time mass higher education reached its peak in Europe. As Peter Scott had pointed out already in 1995, this development of mass education did not take place in isolation but was related to a much wider transformation in the nature of society and the structure of the economy(ies) in the late 20th century and it affected the intellectual culture as well as science and technology.<sup>385</sup> At the same time the limits of public spending on (higher) education were reached. Cost effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of higher education became serious issues, and were related to quality assurance mechanisms and (high) dropout rates. In the background the information and communication society, based on the revolutionary development of new technology, developed at tremendous speed. Internet was commercialized in 1995 and gave rise to electronic mail and instant messaging. As an effect, new social media methods developed by the end of the 1990s. Transparency became a buzz word. The global society was further stimulated by faster and cheaper transportation, which facilitated the internationalization of higher education in terms of staff, but in particular student mobility and curriculum development.

Mechanisms for the latter were – as outlined earlier – developed from 1985 in the framework of the ERASMUS Programme, and in particular its European credit system based on student workload instead of contact hours. However, as outlined in the previous chapter, a credit system would not be a sufficient answer to societal challenges as described above and was not the sole solution for (trans)national mobility of students and cooperation between higher education institutions in and

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<sup>383</sup> Steven Radelet and Jeffrey Sachs, *The Onset of the East Asian Financial Crisis*, 1998. Retrieved from: [http://scholar.google.nl/scholar\\_url?hl=nl&q=http://academiccommons.columbia.edu/download/fedora\\_content/download/ac:124144/CONTENT/paper27.pdf](http://scholar.google.nl/scholar_url?hl=nl&q=http://academiccommons.columbia.edu/download/fedora_content/download/ac:124144/CONTENT/paper27.pdf); Iris van de Wiel, *The Russian Crisis 1998. Economic Report*, September 16, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://economics.rabobank.com/publications/2013/september/the-russian-crisis-1998/>; Worldbank, “Country Note F. Lessons and Controversies From Financial Crises in the 1990s”, in: *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform*. p. 242-251: Worldbank, 2005. <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/lessons1990s/>

<sup>384</sup> European Commission, *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, White Paper, Luxembourg: European Commission, 1996, 1. Retrieved from: [http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white\\_papers/pdf/com95\\_590\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com95_590_en.pdf)

<sup>385</sup> Peter Scott, *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education*, Buckingham: Open University, 1995.

outside Europe. It was concluded that the emphasis should be much more on the outcomes of the learning process – as well as on the accumulation of credits –, with much more attention to be given to transferable or general skills and competences. It was also thought necessary to highlight the role of higher education institutions as major contributors to the welfare of society. This fitted in the described trend in which higher education institutions were forced to show that they are accountable, responsible, and sustainable. It was thought that this should not only apply to the higher education institution but also to all individual degree programmes on offer.

As will be explained in the next chapter in greater detail, the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project was launched in the autumn of 2000 to contribute through a bottom-up approach in finding an appropriate response to these challenges. The project should offer academics a key role in the modernisation of higher educational structures, programmes and qualifications to make them more relevant to the needs of society. This process would require the development of a ‘common language’ to be understood by all major stakeholders, identified as academics, students, graduates, (potential) employers of graduates as well as professional organisations. All these groups should be involved in the process of curriculum design and quality enhancement, in which the focus should be on diversification of degree programmes by profiling and stimulating flexibility. Flexibility to be understood as offering students options for personalising their programme by combining major studies with minor programmes, electives and mobility programmes.

## Change of paradigm

As stated in the introduction the focus in this chapter is on the methodology and terminology developed by Tuning and applied to respond to these challenges. During time these have been further developed and fine-tuned. When defining the Tuning project the approach and terminology to be used was not chosen lightly. By focusing on competence development and relating these to the outcomes of the learning process, the initiators were very much aware that the change in higher education had to be made from the then dominant expert driven approach to a student centred approach. Tuning stood out and was rather original by integrating the concepts of competences and learning outcomes (1) by stating that level of competence should be expressed in terms of learning outcomes statement as well as vice versa and (2) by relating both concepts to the definition of profiles for subject areas.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*. Bilbao and Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 24.



By making this choice Tuning aligned with a development which had obtained credibility in the preceding decade. In 1995 Robert B. Barr and John Tagg published their ground breaking article in *Change. The Magazine for Higher Education*, entitled “From Teaching to Learning. A new paradigm for undergraduate education”.<sup>387</sup> According to the authors a shift was taking place in US colleges from *providing instruction* to *producing learning*. This meant, in their vocabulary, a change from the *Instruction Paradigm* to the *Learning Paradigm*. They bluntly called the first paradigm no longer effective, by quoting an article in the same Journal published in the autumn of 1994: “the primary learning environment for undergraduate students, the fairly passive lecture-discussion format where faculty talk and most students listen, is contrary to almost every principle of optimal settings for student learning.”<sup>388</sup>

Peter T. Ewell, executive editor of the magazine noted in the autumn of 2002 that the Barr-Tagg article had been “arguably the most widely cited piece that *Change* has ever published”. He made this remark in the foreword of a book *The Learning Paradigm College*, John Tagg published in 2003 as a follow-up to the article. Mid-2018 the contribution had been cited more than 4800 times. The article gained support and met severe criticism. Tagg himself was surprised by its reception which in his wording “struck a responsive chord with many in the higher education community”<sup>389</sup> This is remarkable against the background that already during the mid-1980s national ground breaking reports were published in the US which highlighted the issues at stake.<sup>390</sup> The terminology regarding learning we now know so well has been developed since. What alarmed the readers of the article was probably less its content as the use of the phrase *educational paradigm shift*. Did the reports and the article have much impact in the shorter run? In 2002 they had not yet, as Ewell stipulates in the foreword cited above. That does not mean that the issues covered by the article of Barr and Tagg were not current. What makes the article very important is not only the readability of their argument but also and in particular the comparison of the old and new paradigms, the Instruction Paradigm and the Learning Paradigm, structured

<sup>387</sup> Robert B. Barr and John Tagg, From Teaching to Learning. A new paradigm for undergraduate education, in: *Change. The Magazine for Higher Education*, Volume 27, Issue 6, November/December 1995, pp. 13-25.

<sup>388</sup> Alan E. Guskin, Reducing Student Costs and Enhancing Student Learning. The University Challenge of the 90's – Part II: Restructuring the Role of Faculty, *Change*, Volume 26, Issue 5, September/October 1994, pp. 16-25.

<sup>389</sup> John Tagg, *The Learning Paradigm College*, ix-xii.

<sup>390</sup> *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education. Final Report of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education*. October 1984. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED246833>; *Integrity in the college curriculum: a report to the academic community: the findings and recommendations of the Project on Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees*. Washington DC: Association of American Colleges, 1985.

around six topics: mission and purposes; criteria for success; teaching/learning structures; learning theory; productivity/funding and nature of roles.

Some of the key words are picked out here from this comparison: produce learning (versus delivering instruction); improve the quality of learning (versus improve the quality of instruction); quantity and quality of outcomes (versus quantity and quality of resources); holistic (versus atomic); cross disciplinary (versus independent disciplines); external evaluations of learning (versus grading within class); degree equals demonstrated knowledge and skills (versus accumulated credit hours); knowledge is constructed, created (versus learning is cumulative and linear); learning is student centred and controlled (versus learning is teacher centred and controlled); learning environments and learning are cooperative, collaborative and supportive (versus the classroom and learning are competitive and individualistic); funding for learning outcomes (versus funding for hours of instruction). This all culminates in a changing role for (the) academics. According to the new paradigm they are no longer primary instructors but primary designers of learning methods and environments, which requires academics and students work in teams with each other and with other staff. The main role of academic staff is to “develop every student’s competencies and talents”.<sup>391</sup>

The Tuning initiators concluded, like Barr and Tagg, that a change of paradigm was required in the way higher education was organized and implemented. This was the core of the Tuning project proposal submitted to the European Commission in the autumn of 2000. Nevertheless, there were also striking differences. First of all Tuning intended to cover both undergraduate and (post) graduate studies. It also thought it wise to involve main stakeholders, besides academics and students, that is graduates, employers and professional organisations, in implementing the initiative. Here overlap can be found with an approach outlined in a study published in 1998 – less influential than the Bar-Tagg paper – entitled *The Bases of Competences: Skills for Lifelong Learning and Employability*. The book provides a rationale and structure for introducing a competency-based approach in higher education teaching and learning. It was the outcome of interviews with graduates and company managers in Canada. The key conclusion of the study is that the gap lies not in technical skills but in generic abilities such as empathizing, innovation and leading.<sup>392</sup> The planned involvement of non-academic stakeholders in the Tuning initiative was clearly related to the aim formulated in the Bologna Declaration to promote European citizens’ employability. To avoid any misunderstandings, Tuning stipulated at the same time that

<sup>391</sup> Robert B. Barr and John Tagg, *From Teaching to Learning*, 16-17.

<sup>392</sup> F.T. Evers, J.C. Rush and I. Berdrow, *The Bases of Competence: Skills for Lifelong Learning and Employability*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998. Mid-2018 the book had been cited 490 times.

this should be read in conjunction to the role of higher education institutions have for personal development of the student as well as preparing them for citizenship.

Tuning developed a two way approach: on the one hand to contribute to the development of easily readable and comparable degrees by identifying common ground and on the other by developing a bottom-up approach for modernising existing and new degree programmes by strengthening the role of higher education institutions in today's societies. The context was most of all a European one. Having more than ten years of experience with large scale student mobility in Europe – which showed partial failure in recognition of period of studies taken elsewhere – as well as a growing gap between the content of degree programmes and the requirements of society, urged action on the part of universities. If the universities and their academics were not able to take the lead in the required reform process, others would do it for them. The Sorbonne (1998) and the Bologna (1999) Declarations were clear indicators in this respect.

### 'New terminology'

To develop its agenda Tuning needed a "language" to be able to communicate with all stakeholders involved, and for the stakeholders to communicate among each other; a language, which would be understood as being relevant for the changes to be made and the results to be obtained. It introduced – in conjunction – the concepts of competences and learning outcomes in its discourse with academics from a range of disciplines, which were named subject areas to stress the wider context. Of course, these were not new concepts, but linking the competences and learning outcomes gave a special focus to the project. The use of the term competence symbolizes and underpins the intention to relate the higher education sector to the labour market. Tuning was well aware that the language chosen originated from outside academia. The term competence has a long history going back to Ancient times, but seems to be 'established' already in different languages in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>393</sup>. In 1973 it was related to education by Harvard professor David McClelland.<sup>394</sup> In the

<sup>393</sup> M.T. Mulder, Weigel and K. Collins, The concept of competence concept in the development of vocational education and training in selected EU member states. A critical analysis, in: *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 59, No.1, 2006.

The Oxford English Dictionary suggest the first use was by Shakespeare in Henry IV, 1597 in the sense of 'a sufficiency of' and E. Burke, French Review, 1790 in the sense of 'capacity to deal with a subject', 291.

<sup>394</sup> David McClelland, Testing for Competence Rather Than for Intelligence, in: *American Psychologist*, January 1973, pp. 1-14. Retrieved from: <http://www.therapiebreve.be/documents/mcclelland-1973.pdf>

1980s it was linked to the professional world in particular Human Resource Development and in the 1990s to the learning paradigm.<sup>395</sup> In a report to the US National Institute of Education (1980), G.O. Klemp defined competence as ‘an underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and/or superior performance on the job’.<sup>396</sup> S.R. Parry refined this definition in 1996 to ‘a cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that reflects a major portion of one’s job (a role or responsibility), that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured with well-accepted standards, and that can be improved with training and development’.<sup>397</sup> The development and use of the concept is reflected in educational research, in which three main traditions developed, starting with the behaviourist approach (McClelland and the Hay Group) followed by the generic approach and the cognitive approach. All three are “performance” oriented but the scope of competences to be owned/ developed is widened through time.

In 1997 Walo Hutmacher could state in the *European Journal of Education* that the term competency is now widely used and accepted in Europe. He added however that there was still discussion on its definition, “doubtless partly due to language differences”. However, he also stipulates that there seems agreement that “the notion of competency lies very firmly within the field of ‘knowing how’ rather than ‘knowing that’”.<sup>398</sup> This is an important observation. For Tuning the same notion was the reason to state that learning outcomes are expressed in terms of competences. This is reflected in its initial definition where it says “by learning outcomes we mean the set of competences including knowledge, understanding and skills a learner is expected to know/understand/demonstrate after completion of a process of learning – short or long”.<sup>399</sup> This fits the definition offered by Hutmacher: “Competency is a general capability based on knowledge,

<sup>395</sup> P. Hodkinson and M. Issitt, *The challenge of competence*. London: Cassell, 1995.

See also: M. Eraut, *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*. London: Routledge, 1994;

L.M. Spencer, & S.M. Spencer, *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994; H. van den Bosch & R. Gerritsen, , “Het verwerven van conceptuele competentie als doelstelling van wetenschappelijk onderwijs”, *Tijdschrift Voor Het Hoger Onderwijs*, Vol. 15, 1997, pp. 365-389; K. Schlusmans, R. Slotman, C. Nagtegaal. & G. Kinkhorst, G. *Competentiegerichte leeromgevingen*, Utrecht, Lemma B.V., 1999. See also the References as included in the chapter “Learning Outcomes: Competences”, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 94-98.

<sup>396</sup> G.O. Klemp, *The assessment of Occupational Competence*. Report to the National Institute of Education. Washington, 1980, 21.

<sup>397</sup> S.R. Parry, The Quest for Competence, in: *Training Magazine*, July 1996, 48-56, quote 50.

<sup>398</sup> Walo Hutmacher, Key Competencies in Europe, in: *European Journal for Higher Education*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1997, 45.

<sup>399</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 24.

experience, values, dispositions which a person has developed through involvement with educational practices. Competencies cannot be reduced to factual knowledge or routines; to be competent is not always synonymous with being knowledgeable or cultivated”.<sup>400</sup>

This did not imply that the concept of competences was not challenged. It was from the moment that the concept was linked to education. From a present day perspective criticisms in the 1990s discourse regarding the term were strongly inspired by defending the staff centred approach. As Sultana summarizes the debate: “competence approaches were considered to focus on performance at the expense of complex intellectual processes, and reflection *in* and *on* action”. The argument sounds familiar, the competence approach “understates and belittles the role of knowledge and understanding, with the focus on skill serving to separate theoretical from practical knowledge and undermining values of personhood”.<sup>401</sup> It symbolized the ivory tower mentality, which did not value that notions and concepts might change their meaning over time or might be perceived differently in another language or country. Although Sultana argues the contrary, the notion of competences as a way to frame learning was not seriously influenced by these criticisms. Many quibblers seemed to have ignored the fact that the term developed during the most recent two decades into having a more holistic or encompassing meaning covering all elements of learning. In the ongoing discourse among educational scientists the term is put aside by some of them as suffering from ‘fuzziness and conceptual confusion’. This judgement is based on a number of arguments as spelling of the word (GB versus US vocabulary/ competence versus competency), related to different meanings in different contexts: behaviourism versus outcomes. In this argument behaviourism is defined as the competency of an employee related to a high level of performance, while competence is measured against defined standards. Most users of the terms will not be aware of this difference and use them interchangeable nowadays. The difference seems to be relevant for purists only. Another criticism is (or was) that the concept of competence is used as equivalent to knowledge, skill, or ability, which adds to the confusion.<sup>402</sup> Is this indeed conceptual inflation or is it an outdated opinion?

In 2000 it was concluded in an OECD expert paper produced in the framework of the OECD’s Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) Project

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<sup>400</sup> Walo Hutmacher, Key Competencies in Europe, 45.

<sup>401</sup> Ronald G. Sultana, Competence and competence frameworks in career guidance: complex and contested concepts, in: *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*. Vol.18, 2009. See also W. Westera,, Competences in education: A confusion of tongues, in: *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2001, 75–88.

<sup>402</sup> Ronald G. Sultana, Competence and competence frameworks in career guidance, 19-20. See also: W. Westera, Competences in education: A confusion of tongues, in: *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 33, No.1, 2001, pp. 75–88.

(1997-2003) that there is not a single theoretical concept of competence and the paper recommended a pragmatic approach towards the term. According to these experts' competences should be 'conceptualized as the necessary prerequisites for meeting complex demands'.<sup>403</sup>

However, at their meeting in April 2001 the OECD Education Ministers stated in a communiqué that "Sustainable development and social cohesion depend critically on the competencies of all of our population – with competencies understood to cover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values."<sup>404</sup> In a summary report of the DeSeCo Project, published in 2005, it is stated that 'a competency is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes in a particular context'. It also states that 'despite the fact that competencies comprise more than just taught knowledge, the DeSeCo Project suggests that a competency can itself be learned within a favourable learning environment'.<sup>405</sup>

As stated above, Tuning chose as its language of communication with stakeholders the concepts of competences and learning outcomes. By doing so it made the choice for a holistic interpretation of competences. It became firm ground in the years to come. This was confirmed by the EU agency European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) in a report published in 2005. This report which relates in particular to the VET sector, signalled that the dominant theoretical educational frameworks were converging. "Functional and cognitive competences are increasingly being augmented by social or behavioural competences and there appears to be a general movement towards the more holistic approaches that have been associated with Germany and France, where knowledge, skills and social attitudes and behaviours are viewed as related dimensions of competence."<sup>406</sup>

This not only counted for the VET sector, it was also obviously true for Higher Education. In particular in continental Europe the concept of competences to structure teaching and learning gained influence during the last years of the last century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A good example in this respect is the introduction of domain competences for clusters

<sup>403</sup> OECD, *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (DeSeCo). Background paper*. Revised December 2001. P.6. See also: Dominique S. Rychen, and Laura H. Salganik, eds., *Defining and Selecting Key Competencies*. Göttingen, 2001.

<sup>404</sup> Meeting of the OECD Education Ministers, Paris 3-4 April 2001; Investing in Competencies for all (communiqué). Retrieved from: <http://oecd.org/dataoecd/48.24/1870589.pdf>.

<sup>405</sup> OECD, *The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies. Executive Summary* <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf>.

<sup>406</sup> Jonathan Winterton, Françoise Delamare – Le Deist, Emma Stringfellow, *Typology of knowledge, skills and competences: clarification of the concept and prototype*. Cedefop Reference series; 64. Luxembourg, 2006.

of educational programmes developed by the Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, which were published from 2004 on, and which were prepared in the previous years.<sup>407</sup> This is a relevant example for Tuning because the role of this type of university is to educate graduates for particular (type of) most academic disciplines prepare, arguably, more for a wider occupational domain.

In 2006 the European Commission published the European Council and Parliament recommendations on key competences for lifelong learning, in which competences are defined as ‘a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context’.<sup>408</sup> In the literature review prepared in 2012 of the 2006 recommendations, key competences are made equal to learning outcomes by defining as its scope for review ‘the assessment of key competences or similar learning outcomes that emphasize not only knowledge but also skills and attitudes in relation to contexts intended as preparation for lifelong learning’.<sup>409</sup> Due to its policy initiatives, the Commission contributed to defining definitions and terminology, but it also contributed to the confusion of certain terms. For example, in the Communication *A New Skills Agenda for Europe*<sup>410</sup>, the term ‘skills’ is used to refer broadly to what a person knows, understands and can do, which equals the definition of a learning outcome.

More helpful in developing clarity about terminology was the initiative of CEDEFOP. In 2008 it published its multilingual (English, Spanish, German, French, Italian and Portuguese) glossary of terms in: *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms*.<sup>411</sup> Building on an earlier publication, ‘Terminology of vocational training policy’, published four years earlier, it offers definitions of terminology ‘used in education and training policy’ and ‘intended for researchers and more generally for all those involved in education and training policy’. It does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather ‘identifies a selection of key terms that are essential for an understanding of current

<sup>407</sup> Annemarie Knottnerus en Chiel Renique, Domeincompetenties in het HBO als sleutel voor herkenbaarheid en flexibiliteit, in: *Thema*. Vol. 5, No. 4, 2004. Retrieved from; <http://www.vno-ncw.nl/SiteCollectionDocuments/Cmsdocs/domeincompetenties.pdf>

<sup>408</sup> European Commission, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC) Official Journal of the European Union, 30-12-2006.

<sup>409</sup> European Commission (EC), *Education and Training 2020 Work Programme. Thematic Working Group ‘Assessment of Key Competences’. Literature review, Glossary and examples*. Brussels, 2012.

<sup>410</sup> European Commission (EC), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A New Skills Agenda for Europe. Working together to Strengthen Human Capital, Employability and Competitiveness*. (COM 381/2), Strasbourg, 2016.

<sup>411</sup> CEDEFOP, *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008.

education and training policy in Europe'. In 2014 it published an updated and extended edition with 130 terms in seven languages.<sup>412</sup>

As a result of the CEDEFOP and other initiatives more clarity was developed regarding terminology and definitions applied. 'Competence' can no longer be sidelined as a 'fuzzy concept'<sup>413</sup>, because the terms 'skills' and 'competences' are now well discriminated and defined. According to CEDEFOP a skill is the 'ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems'.<sup>414</sup> In the RAND paper on *Learning Gain in Higher Education*<sup>415</sup> a distinction is made between skills and competences. It says: 'Skills are generally defined as the abilities or proficiencies to apply cognitive or practical knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems in certain areas. A competence, in addition to including a skill, covers abilities, behaviours and knowledge that are fundamental to the use of such skill. A competence is a proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development'.<sup>416</sup> The competence definition has been taken from the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* as approved by the European Parliament.<sup>417</sup>

Although, more clarity became apparent during time, it is important to stress here that terminology and definitions develop over time and are based on an agreement on interpretation, which might evolve. A striking example here is the term 'learning objectives' – originally meant as a general statement about the larger goals of the course unit or programme and therefore part of the old paradigm of expert-driven education – but currently (also) defined as the outcomes of a learning process, according to the new paradigm. In the context of this book it is important to offer clarity regarding the terminology applied, because competence, skills and learning outcomes confusingly seem to be used as exchange-

<sup>412</sup> CEDEFOP, *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 130 key terms*. Second edition. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2014.

<sup>413</sup> R. van der Klink, Competentie: een populair maar "fuzzy" begrip, in: *Tijdschrift voor HRM*. Vol. 8, No. 2, 2002, pp. 7–22; M.R. van der Klink and J. Boon, 'Competencies: the triumph of a fuzzy concept', in: *International Journal of HRDM* 3 (2), 2003, pp. 125–137.

W. Westera, Competences in education: a confusion of tongues, in: *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. Vol. 33, No. 1, 2001, pp. 75–88.

<sup>414</sup> CEDEFOP, *Terminology of European education and training policy*. 2nd edition. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2014.

<sup>415</sup> C.B. Hoareau, E. Guerin, M. Harte, M. Frearson and C. Manville, *Learning Gain in Higher Education*. RAND Europe, 2016.

<sup>416</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>417</sup> CEDEFOP, *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 130 key terms*. Second edition. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2014.



able terms or synonyms. This is not correct, because they have clearly different meanings, as has been outlined.

## **Role of Tuning: concept and methodology**

The intention of Tuning was most of all to focus on research based universities and traditional subject areas, not – at first instance – the more applied studies or multi- and interdisciplinary ones. They would follow later. The argument was that when these traditional disciplines could be convinced to adopt the notions of competences and learning outcomes, others would follow. At the launch meeting of the Tuning project in May 2001 many academics were sceptical. In particular because the initiators stressed that the project planned to give special attention to generic competences or transferable skills besides subject specific ones.

Although the initiators were not aware of the “paradigm shift” discussions taking place in the USA and Canada, they were well informed about the European discourses regarding competences and teaching and learning. For them competence development and a shift of paradigm were closely related. The ECTS experience showed them that full recognition of periods of studies or even degrees would never take place if the focus was kept on the content of knowledge. Ten years of intensive experience with ECTS as a transfer system proved that trust and confidence could actually be developed between academics but that course to course comparison continued to be very strong, because equivalent knowledge was sought. The Tuning initiators were also aware that universities were very much focused on themselves (and each other) instead of following what was happening in society. Studies were input and staff-centred based instead of output and student oriented.

When preparing Tuning, no serious discussion took place about (dominant) educational frameworks or typologies to follow. If fitting in any, it would be the holistic multi-dimensional or integrative approach towards competence-based models, allowing for an analytical concept of competences. This would encourage new practices in teaching, learning and assessment, including problem-based learning, project-based and team learning as well as active and autonomous learning. What was also clear, was that the approach would be student-centred, by which is meant an approach or system that supports the design of learning programmes which focus on the learners’ achievements, accommodates different learners’ priorities and is taking into consideration student workload (i.e. workload that is feasible within the duration of the learning programme). Thus promoting greater student involvement in the choice of content, mode, pace and place of learning.

The emphasis in Tuning would be on the methodology to apply; to identify common ground among academics in an international context teamwork and consultation were identified as the key features of this approach and its sense for success. What had been noticed that the theoretical discourse among educational scientists about educational frameworks and typologies and new approaches regarding learning, teaching and assessment had (very) limited impact in day to day life in higher education institutions. University teachers might have heard of or even been acquainted with the typologies such as those of Benjamin Bloom and theories such as of John Biggs regarding learning<sup>418</sup>, but these had limited to no influence in the teaching and learning process itself. In other words, advocating educational theory and methodologies developed by experts would not lead to change in how educational programmes were actually designed and implemented.

The strategy, instead, was to come-up with simple approaches and solutions for complex issues. This on the one hand meant to develop a feasible and convincing methodology to modernise higher degree programmes and on the other hand to develop guidance and acceptable models on which the reform of individual degree programmes could be built. This would require full alignment and serious commitment of large numbers of academics who could act as peers for their subject area.

To establish the basis for change, it was thought necessary to identify common points of reference. These reference points should be dynamic and allow for diversity, autonomy and flexibility. At all costs Tuning wanted to avoid harmonization of degree definitions, because it would not only hinder personal development, but most of all possibilities for employment and mobility of students and graduates. Although they might be used in setting standard for a given discipline, the term standard as such was avoided to make clear that the points of reference to develop were not set in stone. The idea was and is to update them regularly to keep reflecting present day developments and the state of the art of the discipline involved.

This philosophy thus implied the choice of the competence approach as the backbone for the Tuning initiative. This choice would allow for an open discussion for what made the core of a discipline but also its relation to and relevance for society both in terms of research outputs and type of students to graduate.

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<sup>418</sup> J. Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*, Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, Maidenhead, 1999; J. Biggs, What the Student Does: teaching for enhanced learning, in: *Higher Education Research & Development*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1999, pp. 57-75; J.B. Biggs and K. Collis, *Evaluating the Quality of Learning: the SOLO taxonomy*. New York: Academic Press, 1982; Bloom, B.S., M.D. Engelhart, E.J. Furst, W.H. Hill, D.R. Krathwohl, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: the classification of educational goals. Handbook I: Cognitive domain*. New York: David McKay Company, 1956.

As stated above, in the project outline emphasis was given to the growing role of generic competences or transferable skills (subdivided in instrumental, interpersonal and systemic ones) besides subject area competences for the dynamic society of the 21st century. Although the distinction between generic and subject specific competences was made, there was full awareness from the start that they are closely related. This implied agreement that generic competences could not seriously be developed and applied without a domain of knowledge and that – although named transferable skills – these were influenced by the subject area involved. In some cases, generic competences would even be seen as subject specific ones, if they were at the core of the subject area. To illustrate this point: the competence *abstract thinking, analysing and synthesizing* in history is based on a different theoretical and methodological framework than for example the one used in physics or mathematics. This also applies – in general – for oral and written skills, leadership, teamwork, entrepreneurial spirit etc. because each discipline has its own academic culture and paradigm.

In methodological terms the basic idea of Tuning was to develop – on the basis of agreed and shared reference points – so-called (inter)national competences frameworks for subject areas. For each of these competences frameworks it was identified that a group of a minimum of 12 to 15 international experts (depending on the subject area) was established to arrive to results which would be accepted by the academic community involved. Its members were selected from a wide range of countries and were representing their country model and higher education institution in their field.

The process started with a mapping process to describe the field involved and to identify the employability field(s) for which graduates are prepared (in wide terms if required) followed by a consultation of stakeholders. To prepare for the first Tuning consultation process ever a common list of generic competences was drawn up by the different groups together. This led to a list of 30 generic competences for Europe. That list was revised over time, which implied that competences were rephrased and replaced. Tuning projects in other part of the world draw up their own agreed list of generic competences.

Furthermore, each disciplinary group – originally in Europe, later in other world regions – developed its own list of so-called key subject area competence statements which should ‘frame the subject area’. This list contained on average of 25 statements. That list was established on the basis of a collection of ideas and expectations regarding degree programmes in the subject area resulting from open reflection and group discussion. On the basis of this long list consensus was sought on a short list (key competences) to be used for the consultation process. Because the focus was on competences to be covered in the subject area as a whole, the first cycle/ bachelor and the second cycle/ master were not distinguished. To allow for the consultation process, each university drew up a list of

relevant employers for its field, a list of graduates which graduated within the last 3 to 5 years and a list of academics to be consulted. In the first European consultation round (2001-2002) no students were consulted. The Tuning America Latina project decided in 2004 to involve also students in the latter years of their degree programme. This has been standard procedure since. After finishing the consultation process, its results were analysed by the subject area group involved. This led to a redefining of the original subject specific competences lists. The next step in the process was to design academic and professional frameworks for each of the cycles, preferably formulated as descriptors and to build consensus on the most relevant competences for each of them, combining both what is common for academic recognition and what is different (the specific features).

As part of the Tuning America Latina 2 Project (2011-2013) ideas about the development of competences frameworks were further refined and deepened, by introducing the concept of meta-profiles. Both reference points and meta-profiles have the aim to identify and describe the core (elements) of a discipline/ subject area. However, the meta-profile approach is slightly different. While in the original approach the focus is on identifying the core or key competences, both generic and subject specific, in the second approach the focus is on the clustering of generic and subject specific competences to derive so-called meta-competences.<sup>419</sup> The interlinked groups of meta-competences then serve as the basis for defining a meta-profile (competences framework) which captures the essence of the discipline in more general terms. When the meta-profile is decided, it can be used as a basis for constructing individual degree programmes. This approach has successfully been used as the Tuning publication *Meta-perfiles y perfiles. Yna nueva aproximación para las titulaciones an América Latina* (2014) shows us.<sup>420</sup>

This new method which was and is being applied later in Tuning projects in other regions of the world such as Russia, Africa, Central Asia, South East Asia and India, offers us a more sophisticated way forward, because the existing template of collecting a long list of competences and then boiling it down to the more essential ones, lacked sufficient structure.

Two main approaches have been developed for the grouping of competences. The first is to cluster the most related competences in a feasible number of groups, a minimum of five to a maximum of eight. After having done so, a label for each group is decided which reflects best its content and purpose. However, it is also possible to work the other way around, defining labels for the group's first and then using these as a basis for clustering the competences. Each group or meta-competence will contain a mix of generic and subject specific compe-

<sup>419</sup> González, Julia and Maria Yarosh, Buiding Degree Profiles. The Tuning Approach, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Issue No. 1, November 2013, pp. 37-69.

<sup>420</sup> Pablo Beneitone, Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Meta-perfiles y perfiles. Yna nueva aproximación para las titulaciones an América Latina*. Bilbao: Universidad de Bilbao, 2014.

tences. This is fully in line with the Tuning philosophy, which requires that these are developed together.

## Tuning definitions

Having explored the position of the concept and the way Tuning absorbed and applied these, it seems appropriate to offer insight into the definitions developed and/or used by Tuning over time and to position these in the debate outlined above. We discuss here the concepts competences, learning outcomes and learning objectives. Also attention is drawn to the distinction between skills and competences.

Against the background that the term and concept of *competence/competences/competency/competencies* were challenged, it was perceived as important to develop clear definitions. Tuning did not have and does not have the illusion it would and will be standard setting in this respect, but at least it wanted to provide clarity for the users of its approach.

Day to day practice showed that many academics had (and still have) difficulties in distinguishing the concepts of competenc(i)es and learning outcomes. This also applies to learning outcomes and learning objectives. The difference between competences and skills also seems to be problematic. Although there are different appreciations of the terms in different languages and cultures, we focus here on the use of English.

The basic idea in Tuning was and is that the role of education is primarily to make the student/ learner more *competent* as a result of a learning process. This is wider than knowledgeable and skilled, it also involves acting and 'how to be'. This is relevant for personal development, preparing for citizenship as well as positively affecting the learner's employability.

As was stated previously, Tuning uses an encompassing definition of competence. Competences should be understood as *a dynamic representation of demonstrated knowledge, understanding/insight/ comprehension, (subject specific and generic) intellectual, practical and interpersonal skills and (ethical) values*. They cover the whole spectrum of capabilities from pure theoretical and methodological knowledge to vocational knowledge/insight and from research abilities to practical abilities. Fostering these competences is the object of all educational programmes. Competences are formed during the process of learning by the student in succeeding course units or modules and are assessed at different stages. Competences are therefore owned by the student/ learner.

*A learning outcome* is understood as *a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning*. Learning outcomes indicate the *level of competence* that is intended

and should be achieved. They are in other words the specifications of the results and outcomes of a learning process. The learning process again is based on an identified set of competences, which are developed gradually. Learning outcomes are distinguished in degree programme learning outcomes and module and/or unit learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are defined by academic staff preferably involving student representatives.

Although, these definitions seem to be clear, Tuning has nevertheless been criticized for its use of terminology. The criticisms seem to originate from a misinterpretation of the concepts Tuning developed. Because Tuning is using the concept of competence(s) it is thought that it is embracing the traditional concept of Competence-Based Approach to Education and Training (CBET) which was developed in the 1990s and is associated with Vocational Education and Training.<sup>421</sup> This is not what Tuning intended to express. It is also a misunderstanding – stipulated by educational scientists – that the Bologna Process is built on this approach.<sup>422</sup> Tuning has indeed drawn attention to the development of generic competences besides the subject specific ones as part of the learning process, because they are of crucial relevance for functioning in today's society. However, in the Tuning philosophy these generic competences are intellectual as well as practical. To name a few: 'identify, pose and resolve problems', 'to be critical and self-critical', 'abstract and analytical thinking and synthesis of ideas', 'generate new ideas', 'to take the initiative and to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and intellectual curiosity' besides 'applying knowledge in practice', 'work in a team', 'evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced'. In the view of Tuning these types of competences should be developed/ learned in close alignment with a body of knowledge, that is the subject area. Tuning has shown these can be developed at different stages during the learning process by using level descriptors/ levels of mastery and indicators.<sup>423</sup> This approach can be named Competence-based learning but this is not the same as CBET. As stated before, Tuning uses identified sets of competences for

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<sup>421</sup> An overview of history, concept, features and objectives in: Thomas Deissinger and Silke Hellwig, *Structures and Functions of Competence-based Education and Training (CBET): A Comparative Perspective*. Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung gGmbH/Capacity Building International, Germany. Mannheim: InWEnt, 2005. See also: John Preston, *Competence Based Education and Training (CBET) and the End of Human Learning. The Existential Threat of Competency*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>422</sup> Terry Hyland, "Swimming against the tide: reductionist behaviourism in the harmonisation of European higher education systems.", in: *Education: Journal Articles*. Paper 9, 2006. Retrieved from: [http://digitalcommons.bolton.ac.uk/ed\\_journals/9](http://digitalcommons.bolton.ac.uk/ed_journals/9) and Rudi Kothik, Process Oriented Teacher Education as an Alternative to the Competence-Based Approach to Education and Training, in: M. Simons, a.o. eds., *Curating the European University. Exposition and Debate*. Leuven: University Press, 2011, 74.

<sup>423</sup> Aurelio Villa Sánchez and Manuel Poblete Ruiz, eds., *Competence-based learning. A proposal for the assessment of generic competences*. Bilbao, 2008.

identifying the reference points of a particular subject area now named meta-profile or conceptual framework.

Therefore, it does not recognize itself in such criticisms as expressed by Hyland<sup>424</sup> and Hager for example. Hager, author of the integrated competence approach states: “despite its laudable aims, a project that features such flaws in its foundations, is argued to be fatally deficient ...because it fails to recognize a number of clear conceptual distinctions between, e.g. ‘performance’ and its ‘outcomes’”. What is meant here in the wording of Hager is that “...performance outcomes can be specified precisely, and that the Tuning learning outcomes are a species of performance outcomes. However, by contrast, competences cannot be specified precisely in this way. So the Tuning Project, by mistakenly equating learning outcomes and competences, gives the latter a false objectivity.”<sup>425</sup> As has been shown above, Tuning has been very much aware of the difference. However, it also has been acknowledged that it realized during time that a more precise model for defining competences as well as learning outcomes statements was required. This is why Tuning setup a project with ENIC -NARIC *Competences in Education and Recognition (CoRe)* (2006-2010) which was co-financed by the European Commission again.<sup>426</sup> In the setting of this project an instrument was developed to write good programme and unit learning outcomes statements.<sup>427</sup> Other initiatives to improve the quality of competence and learning outcomes descriptors are the *Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks in the Humanities and the Arts (HUMART)* (2010-12)<sup>428</sup> and the feasibility study *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education (CALOHEE)* (2016-2018). These initiatives are discussed in more detail in next chapters.

A *learning objective* outlines the material the teaching staff intends to cover or the questions related to the discipline that the class will address. This approach

<sup>424</sup> Terry Hyland, “Swimming against the tide: reductionist behaviourism in the harmonisation of European higher education systems”

<sup>425</sup> P. Hager, Some Conceptual Questions About the Tuning Project, in: *Prospero*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006.

<sup>426</sup> CoRe website: <http://www.core-project.eu>

<sup>427</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff, Bas Wegewijs, Katja Durkin, Robert Wagenaar, Julia González, Ann Katherine Isaacs, Luigi F. Donà dalle Rose and Mary Gobbi, eds., *A Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles. Including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes*. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague, 2010, 44-48.

<sup>428</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning Sectoral Framework for Social Sciences. Final Report 2008-2010*. Bilbao, 2010. Published as a brochure, and approachable on the Tuning website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/tuning-sqf-social-sciences/documents-a-publication.html>; Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010 – 2011 [SQF HUMART Final Report 2010-2011]*. Bilbao: University of Deusto, 2012. Retrieved from: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF\\_HUMART\\_Final\\_Report\\_2010-2011.pdf](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF_HUMART_Final_Report_2010-2011.pdf)

means in practice that the focus is on the teaching process (not the learning process) and on knowledge transfer of the academic staff member to the students.<sup>429</sup> However, in particular in the United States but also in other countries learning objectives may be read and understood as learning outcomes.<sup>430</sup> The fact that sometimes different wording is used for the same concept or notion does not automatically mean that the terminology used is blurred.<sup>431</sup>

More complicated, finally, is the use of the terms *skills and competences*. Tuning has not always been consistent in its use. According to the definition outlined, skills are an intrinsic part of competences. In reality the project sometimes used the terms alongside each other in its publications and presentations. This happened in particular during<sup>432</sup> the first years of Tuning, when the project was still developing. However, since the launch and endorsement of the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* (EQF for LLL) the landscape of terminology has changed. In the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of 2008, which is mostly VET inspired but also covers higher

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<sup>429</sup> Definition used by the University of Toronto. Retrieved from: <http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/topics/coursedesign/learning-outcomes/outcomes-objectives.htm>

<sup>430</sup> The following example is taken from the University of Texas to illustrate this: “A competency is the capability to apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform “critical work functions” or tasks in a defined work setting. Competencies often serve as the basis for skill standards that specify the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in the workplace as well as potential measurement criteria for assessing competency attainment. (...). Competencies define the applied skills and knowledge that enable people to successfully perform their work while learning objectives are specific to a course of instruction. Competencies are relevant to an individual’s job responsibilities, roles and capabilities. They are a way to verify that a learner has in fact learned what was intended in the learning objectives. Learning objectives describe what the learner should be able to achieve at the end of a learning period. Learning objectives should be specific, measurable statements and written in behavioral terms. In short, objectives say what we want the learners to know and competencies say how we can be certain they know it.” University of Texas School of Health.

<https://sph.uth.edu/content/uploads/2012/01/Competencies-and-Learning-Objectives.pdf>

<sup>431</sup> University of Texas School of Health. Retrieved from:

<https://sph.uth.edu/content/uploads/2012/01/Competencies-and-Learning-Objectives.pdf>

Another interesting example of a learning objective definition is the following. The example is taken from the University of New Mexico School of Medicine: A learning objective is an outcome statement that captures specifically what knowledge, skills, attitudes learners should be able to exhibit following instruction. A common misapplication of objectives is for the teacher/presenter to state what he/she is going to do (e.g., “My plan this morning is to talk about...”), rather than what the student is expected to be able to do (e.g., “After this session, you should be able to...”). Retrieved from: <http://ccoe.rbhs.rutgers.edu/forms/EffectiveUseofLearningObjectives.pdf>

<sup>432</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning Sectoral Framework for Social Sciences. Final Report 2008-2010*. Bilbao, 2010. Published as a brochure, and approachable on the Tuning website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/tuning-sqf-social-sciences/documents-a-publication.html> and Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010 – 2011 [SQF HUMART Final Report 2010-2011]*. Bilbao: University of Deusto, 2012. Retrieved from: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF\\_HUMART\\_Final\\_Report\\_2010-2011](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF_HUMART_Final_Report_2010-2011).



education, three main categories are distinguished to order the outcomes based descriptors: knowledge, skills and competences. According to its official definition 'competence' "means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy."<sup>433</sup> Tuning preferred the use of the term 'wider competences' as one of the descriptors to avoid misunderstandings. In a revision of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, endorsed by the European Council and Parliament in 2017, it was decided to replace the descriptor competences by 'responsibility and autonomy'. As a result more clarity has been created.

## In conclusion

There is no doubt that the concepts of competences and learning outcomes underpinning the student-centred approach are phenomena in today's higher education. They have become tools for degree programme design, development and enhancement, as well as for quality assurance and accreditation. Although there might still be some confusion about the exact definitions of terms introduced and used, this does not imply that the multi-dimensional or integrative approach towards competence-based models has not taken the lead. It has, although there is still a long way to go to get it implemented at all levels of higher education. As might be expected many academics have difficulties coping with the changes proposed, in particular because they are so fundamental. Working according to a new paradigm requires time and effort. Although Tuning and the European Commission, in particular CEDEFOP, have developed tools to assist this change in paradigm, it is still a challenge to follow. Identifying an appropriate set of competences to define a degree programme profile is already an effort, let alone the definition of degree programme learning outcomes and programme unit learning outcomes. To make these learning outcomes measurable requires skills and experience which in many higher education institutions and departments still have to develop. However, it cannot be stressed enough that using the competence based approach is rewarding, in particular for the group of students educated today and tomorrow, but also for the educational staff and society at large.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> European Commission, *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*. Luxembourg, 2008 Retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/terms\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/terms_en.htm)

<sup>434</sup> Serrano, Rosario Mérida, a.o. , Student Training in Transversal Competences at the University of Cordoba, in: *European Educational Research Journal*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 2011, 47.

Here we refer not only to employability, but explicitly also to personal development and citizenship. There is no doubt that it is enjoyable for an institution, a department and the individual teachers when their graduates find a place in society that suits them well. However, this should not be limited to finding the right job and making a career according to the level of education, although that is a mission in itself. Education has always been associated with personal growth. The opportunities of learning, of understanding how nature and society work holds a significant attraction to the human mind no less than the curiosity of managing natural forces, one's own behaviour or the dynamics of society. The competence-based approach, promoting flexibility and individual pathways offers students of today more opportunities to follow their interest and answer their curiosity.

One of today's challenges for those involved in planning, designing and offering degree programmes is to define precisely what the degree tries to establish and hence which competences it will need to develop in students. An important role of education is to educate students in such a way that they develop greater consciousness of their commitment to society. Who will doubt that knowledge, reflection, capacity, learning, education leading to degrees should not make people more understanding of what is happening in society at various levels, more critical of the outcomes, the limits and the impacts of issues at stake and more creative about various solutions for and possibilities to handle problems? Democratic societies require citizens who think, debate, search, look for alternatives. The role of education in this case is undeniable.

The concept of competences and learning outcomes in the framework of the introduction of the paradigm of student-centred learning as has been developed and applied by Tuning during the last 18 years, is relevant for the higher education sector today. This chapter has intended to show that the choices made were not self-evident.

## 6. Output Versus Input. From an Expert Driven Towards a Student-Centred Model of Higher Education: Policy or Approach?

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### Abstract

*Modernisation in higher education is a complex process involving mutual levels and players. This was well understood by academic experts who had been involved in the development of the European credit system for the European Commission. Taking it as conditional to involve the academic world to make political ambitions – as expressed in the Bologna Declaration – a reality, an international grass-root project was initiated. This project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe launched in the autumn of 2000 obtained the full support of the European Commission. The initiators developed a clear notion that the modernisation process required a well-defined multi-level governance structure to be successful and that the lower levels of that structure were not filled in yet. Including those lower levels should enhance full commitment of all involved, and thus the realization of the intended outcome. Although taking into account that the basic idea of the Ministers was to develop one European Higher Educational Area through convergence and alignment at system level, the Tuning project put emphasis on the tools required to modernise individual higher education programmes by focussing on structures and content. The experts were triggered by two main concerns: lack of recognition of studies taken abroad and the notice that students were insufficiently prepared for their role in a dynamic society in terms of both employability and active citizenship to be understood as social, cultural and civic engagement. This chapter explores the choices that were made regarding the theoretical framework applied and the methodology that was developed, as well as their implementation. The methodology contained two basic elements: an approach to reform higher education programmes and the design of internationally agreed reference points or benchmarks for a range of subject areas.*

### Introduction

Now more than 30 years ago, in 1987, there was good reason to celebrate at the premises of the European Commission, in particular at its task force for human resources, education, training and youth. For a decade it had worked very hard to develop and launch the ERASMUS Programme, the *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*. Its establishment was

not at all self-evident with education being perceived as the prime responsibility of the national states. A number of factors played a decisive role to convince the member states to agree with the action scheme. Firstly, the success of the small scale European Communities 1976 Action Programme which concentrated on setting up transnational joint study programmes, short study visits and university networks, and involved some 500 Higher Education institutions by 1984. Secondly, in the mid-1980s discomfort was felt by policy makers which resulted from growing political cynicism about the European Communities. It was thought necessary to underpin economic policies, that is the development of one single market, by highlighting the cultural dimension of the European Communities as a binding factor for integration and in this setting to give a more prominent place to education.<sup>435</sup>

In 1984 the European Council, as has been mentioned before, published a call to strengthen and promote the European identity and image 'both for its citizens and the rest of the world'.<sup>436</sup> As a follow-up to this call a high level ad hoc committee, which represented the heads of state, was established on 'People's Europe', chaired by the Italian Pietro Adonnino. This committee was given the assignment to come up with concrete initiatives within half a year 'at involving the citizens of Europe more determinedly in the construction of the Community'. In its final report published in June 1985, it proposed not only a comprehensive programme of European inter-university exchanges and studies open to a significant part of European Community students, but also to develop a European academic credit transfer scheme to facilitate mobility.<sup>437</sup> It took a further two years to get the mobility programme in place.

The main reason for setting up the resulting ERASMUS Mobility Scheme was to stimulate a European mind set among new generations of students. In terms of numbers, the programme developed over time into one of the most successful flagship programmes of the European Communities, named European Union from 1993 onward. From its start in the academic year 1987-88 until the present around 4 million students obtained a mobility grant; starting

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<sup>435</sup> Ann Corbett, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Higher Education Policy, 1955-2005*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 126; European Commission, *The history of European cooperation in education and training: Europe in the making – an example*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2006, 99.

<sup>436</sup> European Council, "Conclusions of the Fontainebleau European Council". *Bulletin of the European Communities*. June 1984, No 6. Luxembourg: Office for official publications of the European Communities, 1984, 11-12.

<sup>437</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *A People's Europe. Report from the ad hoc Committee*. Bulletin of the European Communities. Supplement 7/1985. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1985. For the text of the full report. Retrieved from <http://repositori.uji.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10234/49877/Suplemento7-85en.pdf?sequence=1>

with 3244 students in the first year, growing in the academic year 2013-2014 to 212.208.<sup>438</sup> In 2015 the number was 303.880.<sup>439</sup> This initiative became the main driver for internationalization of higher education, but also a means for reform. Indispensable for the latter aspect proved to be the establishment of the *European Community Course Credit Transfer System* (ECTS), which has been discussed in the previous chapter 3, *Working towards the credit*.

## Finding a new angle

On 7-8 July 2000 the group of ECTS counsellors had its annual meeting. At the meeting concerns were expressed about lack of recognition of periods of studies taken at another higher education institution abroad. It was noted that it was still general practice in many institutions and programmes to apply the approach of ‘course to course comparison’ to determine whether students did not miss a ‘piece of knowledge’ that was an integral part of their curriculum. The context was that of fixed programmes not having room for electives, while ECTS promoted the philosophy of recognition for periods of studies allowing flexibility and diversification of learning. To find a convincing response to these inflexible policies, it was suggested to start a new pilot project that should focus on the outcomes of the learning process at different stages, e.g. the first and second cycle, taking into account the main aims and objectives of the Bologna Process launched one year earlier. As in the case of the ECTS Pilot Scheme, the idea was to focus on five different disciplines covering the major sectors of higher education. The European Commission officer responsible for the ECTS dossier Ginette Nabavi, present at the meeting, was not enthusiastic about the suggestion. In her opinion, representing the Commission point of view, this proposal came too close to the Bologna initiative in which the European Commission was not directly involved (yet) and was therefore politically too sensitive. Her policy unit feared that a Commission action in the proposed direction at that stage might work out counter-productive.

Julia González, one of the most experienced ECTS counsellors, did not take this as the final word and continued to reflect on the issue. She was able to set a meeting with three European Commission officers of the Directorate General Education and Culture in October 2000: Marianne Hildebrand (head of the unit

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<sup>438</sup> European Commission, *Erasmus Facts, Figures & Trends. The European Union support for student and staff exchanges and university cooperation in 2013-2014*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2015.

<sup>439</sup> European Commission, *Annual Report 2016. Statistical Annex Erasmus+. Enriching lives, opening minds*. Brussels, 2017. Retrieved on 19 July 2018 from: [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/annual-report-2016-stat-annex\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/annual-report-2016-stat-annex_en.pdf)

for Higher Education policies), Maria-Esmeralda Almeida-Teixeira and Ginette Nabavi. At the meeting set for one hour at the beginning of the afternoon but taking until the early evening, she was able to convince the officers of the necessity of such an initiative. They invited González to prepare a project application for the action Transnational Cooperation Projects in the framework of the SOCRATES Programme, although the deadline for submission had already passed several months before. At the beginning of November she submitted a draft project proposal entitled *Convergence of Higher Education Studies* (CHES) to the European Commission officers mentioned.<sup>440</sup> In the meantime she had involved the author of this book to be the other coordinator for the project and his university the intended grant holder.

The Commission was quite critical of the proposal, stating in a note that ‘the description is too close to Bologna what should be avoided (...) There is a too strong accent on harmonisation and convergence (and only the word Bologna is not there) and ECTS credits throughout’. Therefore also the name given to the project was not thought appropriate. The main message from the officials was that the project outline had to be revised drastically or the proposal would not reach the director, David Coyne, who still had to be convinced of ‘the opportunity and reason for the project’. The initiators got one day to revise the text.<sup>441</sup> Since Julia González, the main author and spiritual mother of the text was unavailable because she was travelling Robert Wagenaar had to adjust the proposal. He came up with a new name *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* and restructured the project along two lines: 1. To develop a strategy to tune the different educational structures in Europe and to build up experience in five disciplines regarding commonly understood and accepted profiles and competences; 2. to reflect jointly on the key issues that are debated at country level, including the measuring of student workload and its relation to learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.<sup>442</sup>

A clear distinction was made in the revised proposal between the different decision making /governing levels involved: the reform of *educational systems*, being the prime responsibility of national governments and ‘the reform of *educational structures* and the ways *teaching is organised and offered*’ being the

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<sup>440</sup> This first draft of the proposal was prepared by Julia González with support of Almudena Garrido (University of Deusto, Bilbao) in consultation with Robert Wagenaar (University of Groningen) and a selected number of ECTS counsellors.

<sup>441</sup> European Commission, Note for the attention of Julia González, Brussels, 5 November 2000, Ref.: CHES project, Tuning archive; E-mail European Commission to R. Wagenaar, with subject ‘Project proposal “tuning educational systems in Europe”’ dated 6 November 2000. Tuning Archive.

<sup>442</sup> Project proposal: SOCRATES – Action 6.1. Application Form for Transnational Cooperation Programmes (New Projects 2000); Title: Tuning educational structures in Europe, Tuning Archive.

prime responsibility of Higher Education institutions and their staffs. Reforms were thought necessary because of changes taking place in the size and content of the labour market due to the development of a common European market and the speed of technical innovations. Instead of inventing the wheel per country – it was argued – it made much sense to coordinate efforts of higher education reforms at disciplinary level. In summary, the following main objectives for the project were identified: 1. develop tools to identify professional profiles and desired outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences in the five subject areas involved: Mathematics, Geology (later re-named Earth Sciences), Business Administration, Education Sciences including Teacher Training and History to bring about a high level of Europe-wide convergence in higher education; 2. facilitate transparency by introducing a common credit accumulation system (ECTS) by restructuring the present transfer system; 3. develop a model curriculum structure for each area, enhancing the recognition and European integration of diploma; 4. to, ultimately, promote mobility of students and teachers. Although the revised proposal was accepted the following day, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, DG Education and Culture continued to be nervous about the political feasibility and implications of the proposed project. It therefore asked the initiators to organise an EU-wide consultation within the limited time of a couple of weeks.

As a result a Call of Interest was launched, the first in its kind, and distributed among the national Conferences of Rectors and Higher Education institutions throughout the EU. The form to be completed for confirming interest had to be signed by the Rector to guarantee commitment at different levels within the institution and returned by fax, the PDF-format not available yet. The response was overwhelming and involved all member states. This offered the EC, and in particular the responsible Commission official Angelika Verli, sufficient confidence to present the proposal to the SOCRATES Committee which met on 26 and 27 November 2000. It is interesting to note that it was Verli who had to defend the proposal, because she had also been the driving force behind the launch and implementation of the ECTS Pilot Scheme 12 years earlier.

Already on 7 November a confidential e-mail had been sent by the then responsible Commission official for ECTS to the group of ECTS counsellors heading 'Pilot Project in ECTS' to do some 'lobbying' among the members of the SOCRATES Committee, although the project attached was not yet approved by the Commission. It was stated that 'if the annexed pilot project is approved (...) we will witness a leap forward in the convergence of higher education structures in Europe thanks to the counsellor's initiative'.<sup>443</sup> Informing the members of that

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<sup>443</sup> Commission of the European Communities, E-mail message to the ECTS Counsellors' group, dated 7 November 2000. Tuning Archive.

committee in advance was thought necessary because of the ‘quite huge’ budget involved. The concern proved to be misplaced, since the members of the SOCRATES Committee, representing both the ministries and the national Rector’s Conferences, welcomed the initiative wholeheartedly. It was thought to be the right project at the right moment. Just before the project proposal was sent to the Committee, director David Coyne asked to put the reference to ‘Bologna’ into the text.<sup>444</sup> A strategic move with the preparations of the next ministerial Bologna Follow-up conference in Prague in mind. One day after the approval by the SOCRATES Committee, the Commission gave green light to the project, of which the eligibility period started two days later. Because the project was not foreseen and therefore the required budget not reserved, it took another 6 months to make the necessary funds available.

This came as no surprise because a project of this size was a new phenomenon for the Directorate General for Education and Culture, which so far had only granted projects on a yearly basis covering some tens of thousands of Euro’s per project. Only after 2000 the system of multi-annual contracts was introduced as part of the SOCRATES II programme (2000-2006) and the maximum grant amount was increased. This was required to facilitate a relatively new type of co-operation, the so-called Thematic Network Programmes (TNs or TNPs), meant to examine the European dimension within a given discipline or to address the cross-disciplinary level with the purpose to enhance quality.<sup>445</sup> Related to its activities, these programmes – starting in the academic year 1996-1997 – obtained funding up to some hundreds of thousands of Euros per year.<sup>446</sup> The calculated budget for the two year Tuning project was in 2000 €809.375 of which half a million was covered by the European Commission

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<sup>444</sup> E-mail message of David Coyne dated 13 November 2000 to head of unit Marianne Hildebrand and the policy officers Ginette Nabavi and Maria-Esmeralda Almeida-Teixeira (and in CC to Angelika Verli) in which he states the following: ‘As regards the “Tuning Education structures ...” I agree that we should go ahead, and that we should fund the two years of the project. I think this is an important one, and I have no difficulty in making our presence known in the different ramifications of the Bologna process. I think that the application should be touched up here and there to mention Bologna, and to be a little more open about the aims of the proposal. I appreciate that harmonization of the educational systems is not our affair; but that is not the aim of the Bologna process either – it is convergence not harmonization (as I understand it, at least). I would be interested to know the basis on which they propose to fulfill their obligations as to publicity’. Tuning Archive.

<sup>445</sup> Anne Klemperer and Marijk van der Wende, Curriculum Development Activities and Thematic Networks. In: Ulrich Teichler, Jean Gordon and Friedrich Maiworm, eds., *SOCRATES 2000 Evaluation Study*. November 2000. Study for the European Commission. Kassel, 2000, 162-171.

<sup>446</sup> The grant amounts ranging from €56.700 to €400.00 per year with the average being below €200.000 and a grant above €200.000 being exceptional. SOCRATES Compendium 2001. Thematic Networks. Approached 29 May 2016: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/Bots/docbots/Documents/Compendium/TN/comp\\_TN\\_2001.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/Bots/docbots/Documents/Compendium/TN/comp_TN_2001.pdf)



grant. The remainder had to be co-financed by the participating institutions by making staff time available.

After the approval of the project a formal letter was sent to the universities that had responded positively to the Call of Interest informing them about an Open Call for participation through the services of the National Agencies. Because it would only be possible – for budgetary reasons – to involve 5 disciplines and 75 Higher Education institutions it was announced that an Inner and an Outer Circle of institutions would be formed. From the very start of defining the project, it was made clear that the national Conferences of Rectors as well as the two existing European Rectors Conferences (in the process of merging, becoming the EUA) would be involved in the selection of institutions for the Inner Circle. By applying this strategy different decision-making levels were aligned. In the first days of April 2001 the institutions were informed about the outcomes of the selection process. Those selected received a letter from the European Commission directly – acting as host – inviting the Inner Circle institutions for the two-days launch meeting to take place at the European Commission Charlemagne Building and in the office building of the Directorate General Education and Culture on 4-5 May 2001.<sup>447</sup> This procedure was necessary due to the fact that the budgetary issue had not been resolved at the time, but it also confirmed the strong interest of the Commission in the Tuning initiative.

## Theoretical and methodological backbone

This book started off by explaining and analysing the reasons for initiating the Bologna Process, having a close look at the Process itself, the actors and the factors involved, as well as some relevant theoretical frameworks such as policy conversion and multi-level governance. In Tuning methodological and theoretical considerations played a central role from the very start, both regarding its governance philosophy, structure and approach and the framework required to organise activities to guarantee the intended outcomes.

It was well understood that the initiated project would have to deal with a number of major challenges. How to position a grass-root level project in the wider context of the Bologna Process? Which levels of decision making were to be distinguished and involved? What would be the best strategy to obtain acceptance and support from the different governance levels. It was presumed

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<sup>447</sup> European Commission, Invitation Letter for the Pilot project “Tuning Educational Structures in Europe” Launching meeting, dated 11 April 2001 of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission, signed by David Coyne, director for Education, Tuning Archive.

that governance of higher education was not limited to governments regarding policy making and higher education universities with respect to implementation. Governments in many countries had a say in the implementation process, while university management was able – through for example the Rectors' Conferences – to influence policy making at national level. Having the experience of the ECTS, there was also full awareness of the role of the European Commission and the two Rectors' Conferences/ the European University Association (EUA).

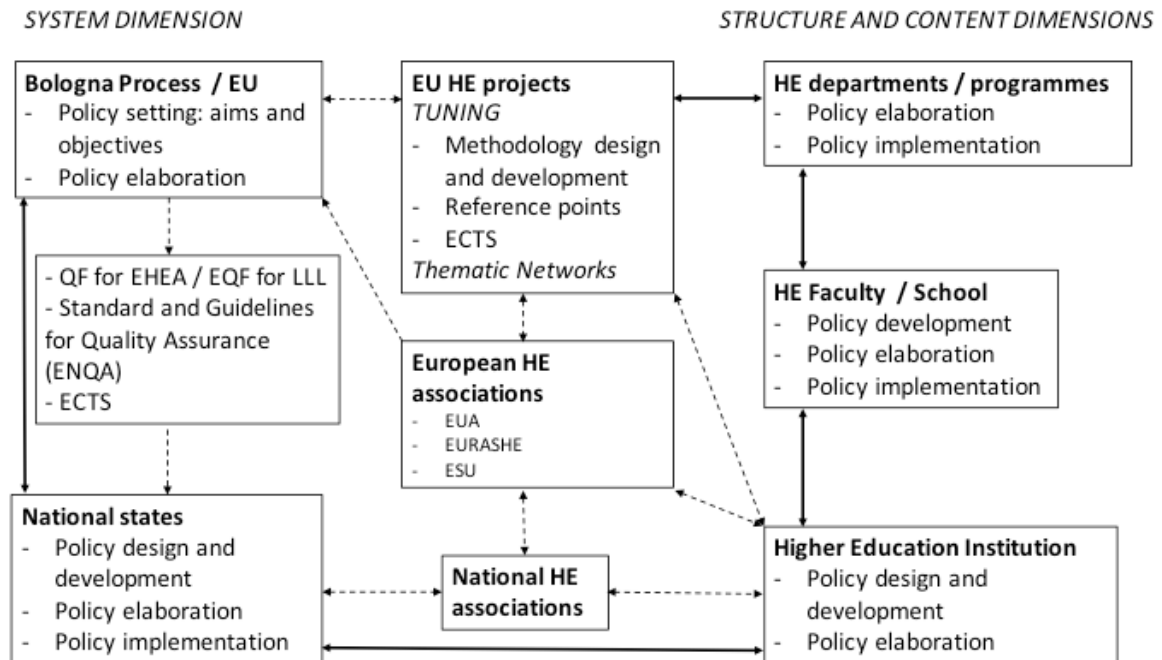
Operating themselves within the context of higher education institutions the Tuning initiators realized that decision making within universities – implying all kinds of professionals – was a complex process, and not limited to the central management level. There was full awareness of the relatively independent positions of Schools/ Faculties/ deans and vice deans for organising education and of the role of departments and their academic staff for the actual implementation process. As a result it was thought best to distinguish three layers of governance in a higher education institution.

Although relevant theoretical concepts for both the governance of the Process and the convergence of policies of the countries involved, had not reached the stage of robust frameworks, when Tuning was launched, the Tuning initiative based its approach on comparable notions. From its start the message of Tuning was that real reforms could not take place successfully without full involvement of the higher education supporting and academic staff. Winning hearts and minds was thought conditional for reform. As part of its strategy, Tuning developed its own multi-level/ multi-actor governance model, which was not made explicit at the time, but operated in the mind of the initiators who handled accordingly in the implementation of the Tuning project. It was made only explicit for the first time in the *Research Handbook on Quality, Performance and Accountability in Higher Education* published mid 2018.<sup>448</sup> The Tuning governance model and the Tunings actors model including its explanation have been taken from this publication.

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<sup>448</sup> Robert Wagenaar, Quality Efforts at the Discipline Level: Bologna's Tuning Process, in: Ellen Hazelkorn, Alexander C. McCormick, Andrew Gibson and Hamish Coates, eds. *Research Handbook on Quality, Performance and Accountability in Higher Education*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2018, 277-279.

*Image 1: Tuning governance model: Bologna Reform Process in Higher Education*



The model distinguishes five levels of policy making, elaboration and implementation, which are linked to each other:

- International level (Bologna Process/ EU)
- National level (Governments/ Conferences of Rectors)
- Higher Education Central Management level
- Faculty/ School level
- Department/ Degree programme level (academic and supporting staff plus students).

The relation between these five levels is not hierarchal and therefore fits both the concepts of multi-level/ multi-actor governance and of historical institutionalism.<sup>449</sup> The model consists of two related pillars which operate alongside one another in coherence – one cannot do without the other. Central in the left pillar (system dimension) is the relation between the European level, in which two types of actors are distinguished: the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), representing the Bologna countries and the European Commission, and the individual national entities. In the right pillar (structure and content dimension) three entities are distinguished: the central management of higher education institutions, the intermediate level, being faculties or schools, and the grass-root level,

<sup>449</sup> Anil Awesti, The European Union, New Institutionalism and Types of Multi-Level Governance, in: *Political Perspectives* EPRU, Vol. 2, No. 8, 2007.

the academic staff responsible for the delivery of study programmes. Making this distinction reflects reality in the vast majority of higher education institutions in which the intermediate and grass-root levels operate more or less autonomously from the central level. Although officially there is a hierarchy between the three levels identified, in reality these are highly interdependent. This is due to the fact that in particular comprehensive higher education institutions house a wide range of quite different disciplines with their own peculiarities.

The model shows that a formal relationship is assumed between the national authorities and the (central) level of the higher education institutions. With regard to policy design and development the national associations of universities (e.g. Rectors Conferences) play an important role. These associations also act as contact points for the European associations of higher education institutions, which in practice are membership organisations. These European associations have a role in the BFUG in an advisory capacity. Mainly through projects they also maintain a relationship with (the Directorates General of) the European Commission. Both the national and European university associations were also perceived by Tuning as important entities in their relation to the European and national HE institutions.

The model shows a link between the subject area level and the EU. This was realised through the SOCRATES and later the Lifelong Learning Action programmes of the EU. From 2000 on the EU also preserved a direct relationship with the subject area group/disciplinary level through both Tuning and the Thematic Network Programmes.

Linked to each of the levels in the model are the type of policies expected, ranging from policy setting (Europe) to implementation, through design and development and elaboration. Each entity has its own designated mix. Two boxes offer an indication of core tools thought central for the reform process. Related to the European level these (core tools) are the general descriptors for the different cycles and the *Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*<sup>450</sup>, as well as ECTS and at the degree programme level the Tuning tools: a methodology for modernising higher education programmes and reference points for subject areas. Included as a Tuning task is also ECTS, because as noted above, Tuning transformed the transfer system into a transfer and accumulation system.<sup>451</sup>

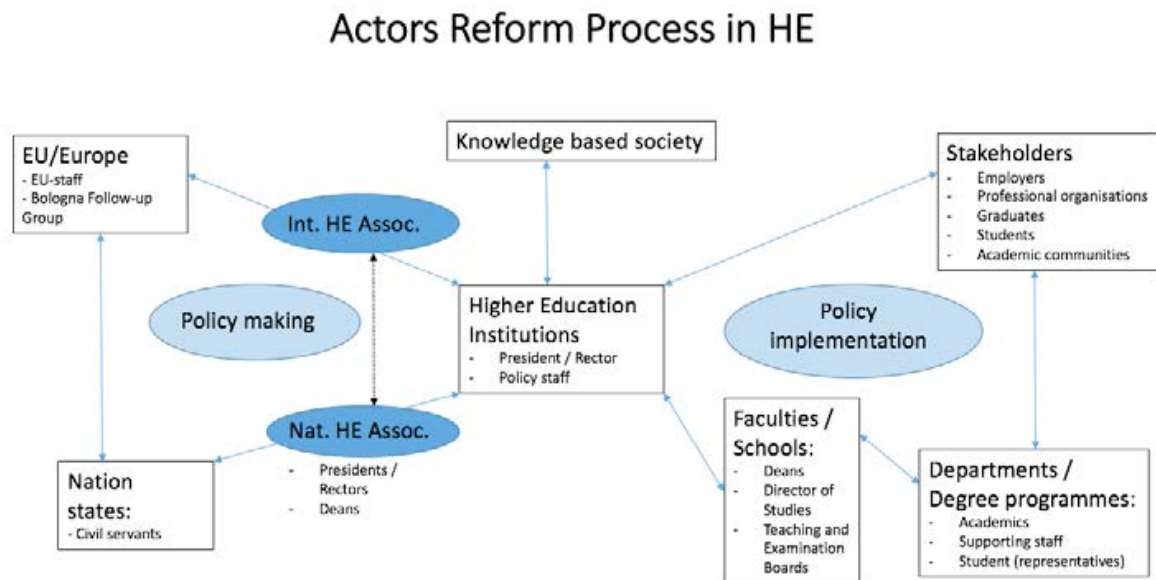
From an actor's perspective according to Tuning, the higher education institutions are the pivotal point in the process of modernisation of higher education. On the one hand they (should) feed through interventions of presidents/rectors/directors to a (very) large extent the policy making process at national and international level

<sup>450</sup> ENQA, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, Brussels: ENQA, 2005; ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, Brussels, 2015.

<sup>451</sup> European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide*, Brussels, 2004/5.

by offering input but also by showing its limitations. On the other they play a central role in the implementation process, although in accordance with multi-level/ multi-actor theory, this largely depends on its deans/ directors at faculty/ school level and the (leading) academic staff at departmental level. The three higher education levels identified in the model also are related to the relevant stakeholders in the reform process: employers and employer's organisations, professional organisations, graduates, academic communities and students. This can be visualised as follows:

Image 2: Tuning actors model: roles and responsibilities in the HE reform process



Although this was the model the Tuning initiators in mind, this was not how the Bologna Process operated in practice. From the Communiqués it can be digested that the connection between policy making and policy implementation was not taken sufficiently serious. It seems that national civil servants underestimated the heterogeneity of the higher education sector as being a very special 'policy field' dominated by 'elephants', that is high level professionals with a quite independent mind-set. Whatever the reason, the higher education institutions were not directly involved in the process of policy making, while – as we have seen in chapter 2 – the BFUG was very much internally oriented, limiting the dialogue to a 'community of officials and experts and far less genuine practitioners'.<sup>452</sup> This had a setback on the implementation of the Bologna reforms at insti-

<sup>452</sup> Bologna Follow-Up Group (2014), *The Bologna Process revisited*. Doc. Code: BFUG\_GR\_KZ\_39\_5a Version 1: 28.03.2014

tutional level and on (not) developing an internal institutional quality culture which would allow for taking full responsibility in terms of performance regarding quality and relevance.

The Tuning initiators were also well aware of the sensitivity of concepts such as harmonization and standardisation not only among policy makers but also among academics. For many colleagues even the term conversion was perceived with (much) suspicion, because academic freedom might be at stake. This perception was fed by cultural differences and the variety of educational models of teaching and learning in Europe. ECTS had shown that for cooperation to make change, trust and confidence building was a prerequisite, as was an agreed shared language (vocabulary). In the case of Tuning this language should not only be understood by the academic world, but also by stakeholders such as employers and professional organisations.

At the time of developing the initial draft proposal the ‘harmonisation’ of systems (the prime responsibility of governments), based on two cycles, and the ‘convergence’ of structures (the prime responsibility of the higher education sector) was taken as the point of departure. As stated above, in the final proposal a twist was already given to this idea by introducing the concept of ‘tuning’ for the reform of higher education degree programmes. This proved to be a fundamental decision reflecting the notion that the modernisation process should not lead to limitations in the freedom of higher education institutions and their academic staffs to organise their own programmes. Indeed the tune fork became a symbol for the Tuning approach as reflected in its logo. It was designed by Josep M. Trias, who designed the logos of the Barcelona Olympic Summer Games of 1992. Central in the design became the multi-lined and four-coloured U in the word Tuning. As a background for the logo the ‘European deep blue’ was chosen. The U should stand for ‘university’, ‘universal’ and ‘union’, but also for open-ended, co-ordinated and flexible, and through its playful four-coloured U design, for dynamism.<sup>453</sup> The choice for the design was explained at the launch meeting at the EU Charlemagne Building in Brussels.<sup>454</sup>

The name Tuning was chosen in terms of musical tuning with the performance of orchestras in mind, not the smooth running of car engines. Its concept was well understood and explained as follows by Clifford Adelman years later: ‘Everybody winds up with the same music staves, range of time signatures, tempo commands, system of notation. Then, all programs in the same discipline sing

<sup>453</sup> Proposals for logo design: Imagen corporative, Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. 7 pp. Tuning Archive.

<sup>454</sup> Tuning Educational Structure in Europe, *Document 1*, Agenda; Power point launch meeting: The Tuning Logo: Background; European Blue, Tuning fork: tuning structures; University-Universal-Union; Open-ended, co-ordinated, flexible U; Diverse, multi-coloured, dynamic. Tuning archive.

in the same key – engineering in A-minor, history in G, business in B-flat – but don't necessarily sing the same melodic line'.<sup>455</sup> It is interesting to note that a comparable analogy was made by the French minister Allègre, when explaining his Sorbonne initiative by comparing Europe 'to an orchestra where different musicians, playing different instruments and using different scores, managed to produce a harmony'.<sup>456</sup> As shown in the first and second chapter of this book, the comparison made by Allègre proved less accurate than he may have hoped or expected.

The choice of the five disciplinary fields to involve in the Tuning project was subject of serious consideration between the Commission and the initiators. There was agreement that traditional and established disciplines should be involved so as not to complicate the identification of competences or learning outcomes (the terminology had not yet been precisely defined) for each field at this initial stage. The Commission had an interest to involve fields not covered by the first selection of Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs) of which the purpose was partly overlapping with that of Tuning.<sup>457</sup> Being so close to the Tuning agenda, the TNPs for Chemistry and Physics decided to join the project as the sixth and seventh Tuning subject area groups and named 'synergy groups'. Their participation cost was covered from their TNP grant.

Both Commission and initiators thought it wise to cover different academic sectors or domains. This resulted in the choice for Business Studies and Educational Sciences representing the Social Sciences, History (the only Tuning subject area group also being a TNP) representing the Humanities and Geology and Mathematics representing the Natural Sciences. Of course, it was realized that Tuning would operate within 'existing disciplinary silos' as the American academic Paul L. Gaston phrased it in his book *The Challenge of Bologna*, 'rather than questioning the rele-

<sup>455</sup> Clifford Adelman, *The Bologna Process for U.S. Eyes: Re-learning Higher Education in the Age of Convergence*. Washington: Institute for Higher Education Policy, April 2009, p. 48. See also from the same author, senior associate of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, *The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction*, Washington: Institute for Higher Education Policy, May 2008.

<sup>456</sup> Cornelia Racké, *Emergence of the Bologna Process*. Paper presented at The Third Conference on Knowledge and Politics. University Bergen, 18-20 May 2005, 13, quoting Allègre, C., Discours au 40<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la conférence des recteurs européens, Bordeaux, 20-21 mai 1999.

<sup>457</sup> 'The main aim of Thematic Networks (TN) is to enhance quality and to define and develop a European dimension within a given academic discipline or study area, or as regards a topic of an interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary nature, or in other matters of common interest (such as university management, quality assurance etc.). This is achieved by means of cooperation between universities, university faculties or departments. Such cooperation should also involve academic associations, learned societies, professional bodies, other partners of socio-economic importance in the public or private sector and, where appropriate, student organisations. Cooperation within Thematic Networks is expected to lead to outcomes which will have a lasting and widespread impact on universities across Europe in the field concerned.': [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/overview/ThemNetworks\\_overview.htm](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/overview/ThemNetworks_overview.htm)

vance of closely defined disciplines for an era when knowledge is multifaceted, associative, and not only multidisciplinary but transdisciplinary'.<sup>458</sup> Being aware of the dynamics of disciplines, for making Tuning feasible it was conditional that the selected disciplines were offered in every EU member state, under a comparable name. Having said this, the choice was made not to use the concept of 'discipline' but instead the concept of 'subject area' (as in ECTS) to allow for a wider connotation. When mapping the academic fields involved in the Inner Circle it proved the right choice had been made, allowing for a range of variation in particular noticeable in and between master programmes.

## Launch meeting

The first day, 4 May 2001, of the launch meeting of the Tuning project can be seen as a reflection of its purpose with an opening by David Coyne, director for Education of the Directorate General for Education and Culture, and a number of tailored presentations, besides explanations of the aim of the project and its methodology and working plan. Tytti Varmavuori, director Education Research Policy at Nokia was invited to give the employer's view on higher education in Europe. Guy Haug, in his capacity as principal adviser of the EUA and author of the first Trends Report, talked about the Tuning Project in the context of the Trends in Higher Education in Europe. The first day was closed by a panel discussion chaired by Eric Froment, the recently appointed first president of the EUA. The programme showed the close relation and interaction between the project and the European Rector's Conference, but also that it was planning to give a lot of attention to the preparation of students for their future role in society, in particular regarding the labour market.<sup>459</sup>

The launch meeting set the tone for the rest of the two years' project period and even for the subsequent projects. On this occasion a format was presented that has been used since, not only for the European projects, but also for nearly all Tuning projects implemented elsewhere in the world. The three most important features of this format are a Tuning meeting Document, a fixed set-up of four meeting days as well as the organisation of the working groups. The meeting document produced in advance for every general meeting would contain two parts, a first part printed on *white paper* offering factual information and agreed papers and a second part printed on *blue paper* offering working papers for discussion and reflection.

<sup>458</sup> Paul L. Gaston, *The Challenge of Bologna. What the United States Higher Education Has to Learn From Europe, and Why It Matters That We Learn It*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing LLC., 2010, 107.

<sup>459</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. *Document 1*, May 2001.



Installed was a core team of the two coordinators and their project assistants<sup>460</sup>, a Management committee and a Steering committee. The Management Committee consisted of the two coordinators, five Higher Education experts from the pool of ECTS counsellors<sup>461</sup> and five Subject Area Coordinators (SACs)<sup>462</sup>, chosen by the five working groups or Subject Area Groups (SAGs) as their representative. Every working group had around 15 members from as many countries to be coordinated by one HE expert and one expert of the field of study. The terminology of SACs and SAGs was copied from the ECTS Pilot Scheme (1989-1995). The members of the Management Committee were also members of the Steering Committee which furthermore contained representatives of the two synergy groups (Physics and Chemistry), TNPs associated to the project<sup>463</sup>, an expert in Lifelong Learning (John Konrad), a representative of the EUA (its secretary-general Lesley Wilson), a representative of the National Agencies (John Reilly), a resources coordinator (Hendrik Ferdinande), a representative of the European Commission and at a later stage three representatives for accession countries<sup>464</sup>. The fixed set-up of meetings implied having a preparatory meeting of the Steering Group/Management Committee, hosted by DG EAC in Brussels, on the second and third day plenary and parallel working group (SAG) meetings and on the final day an evaluation meeting of the Management Committee.

In the first Tuning Document already the dates of the next four meetings were announced, to take place in Denmark, Belgium/Northern part of France, Italy and the Closing meeting (again) in Brussels on 31 May 2002. It intended to show an EU spirit and careful planning. The document offered the rationale of the project, and an overview of its main objectives and 'anticipated outcomes'. Also an Outer Circle was established for all other interested Higher Education institutions, employers and professional bodies, student organisations and accessions countries. The working papers also contained a proposed methodology to

<sup>460</sup> Project assistants: Ingrid van der Meer (University of Groningen) and Almudena Garrido (University of Deusto, Bilbao)

<sup>461</sup> Maria Sticchi-Damiani, Volker Gehmlich, Estela Pereira, Ann Katharine Isaacs, Chantal Zoller and Stephen Adam.

<sup>462</sup> Peder Ostergard (Business), Lars Gunnarsson (Education), Paul D. Ryan (Geology/Earth Sciences), Jean-Luc Lamboley (History) and Alan Hegarty (Mathematics).

<sup>463</sup> Synergy Areas: Physics (Lupo Dona Dalle Rose), Chemistry (Anthony Smith), Languages (Wolfgang Mackiewicz), Humanitarian Development (Julia González), Law (Spyridon Flogaitis), Mechanical Engineering (Francesco Maffioli), Veterinary Science (Tito Fernandes) and Medicine (Enzo Molina). At the second general meeting the synergy areas of Physics and Chemistry became in practice the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Tuning Subject Area Groups (their expenses covered by its respective TNP).

<sup>464</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. *Document 2*, September 2001, 5-7 and Document Closing Conference, Brussels 31 May 2002, 8-9. Representatives accession countries: Raimonda Markeviciene (Vilnius University, Lithuania), Maria Misiewicz (Uniwersytet Wroclawski, Poland) and Henri Luchian (University 'A.I. Cuza', Iasi, Romania, all three also belonging to the ECTS experts group.

be applied. It distinguished four phases. The focus in the first phase was on mapping: the employability field as well as related relevant competences and skills, the degree structure and the definition of the subject area involved, as well as the calculation of student workload. The second phase concentrated on the first degree cycle and the third on the second cycle. In all phases the importance of employability was stressed. Phase four was reserved for rounding off and reaching conclusions.<sup>465</sup>

In the presentation of the outline of the project the relation was emphasized between the Bologna Process and the Luxembourg Process. As was discussed in chapter 2, the latter process being launched in 1997 with the European Employment Strategy (EES) aiming to improve employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability – modernising work organisation and flexibility of working arrangements – and equal opportunities at the level of the European labour market.<sup>466</sup> It is seen as the precursor of the Lisbon Strategy (2000), which incorporated major elements of this Process.<sup>467</sup>

As part of the first phase ‘Investigation of Employability, Competences and Skills’ included in the blue working papers of the Document 1 the drafts of surveys for employers and graduates were presented. It included a provisional list of 29 competences chosen from a long list, the selection of which was made with support of Education Sciences experts of Deusto University (one of the two coordinating universities). The blue pages also contained a work plan for phase 1 to start the consultation on the relevance of ‘generic competences’ four weeks after the launch meeting. At the meeting and before distributing the questionnaire it was slightly revised and expanded to 30 (generic) skills/competences. Academic staff members were surveyed half a year later, in February 2002, and were also asked to offer their opinion with respect to a list of specific competences for their subject area. The outcomes of these consultations will be discussed later. They were in its combination presented at the closing meeting of what would be renamed the Tuning I project.

The detailed organisation of the project as well as the presentation of its basic assumptions and philosophy proved not a guarantee for obtaining full support. Not all academics involved in Tuning were immediately convinced about

<sup>465</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, Power point Presentation of Methodology and Working Plan, Launch Meeting, Brussels, 4 May 2001. Tuning Archive.

<sup>466</sup> European Commission, The birth of the European Employment Strategy: the Luxembourg process (November 1997): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/CS/TXT/?uri=URISERV:c11318>.

<sup>467</sup> European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies. Policy Department: Economic and Scientific Policy Employment and Social Affairs, The Lisbon Strategy 2000 – 2010 An analysis and evaluation of the methods used and results achieved. Final Report. Brussels, 2010, 12: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201107/20110718ATT24270/20110718ATT24270EN.pdf>

the approach and methodology chosen. Already at the Plenary Meeting the focus on employability and generic competences led to sceptical responses. A number of academics thought it was not the role of universities to ‘train’ more practical skills. It was also mentioned that universities should not become an adjunct of employers, with universities having their own responsibilities. The Educational Sciences group opposed the idea of a consultation among employers and graduates initially for reasons of content and methodology. It required a serious intervention of the co-ordinators before its members went along, which was months later than the other groups. For good reasons – shared by the coordinating team -, the view was expressed by this group and by the others that convergence should not lead to uniformity and the formulation of a straight jacket, and diversity should be respected.

The Tuning logo was not perceived as a sufficient safeguard against harmonisation and uniformity in 2001 in this respect. This was confirmed by *The Times Higher* framing the project as ‘Brussels urges harmonization of standards’. An interesting labelling for an initiative driven by universities. In the same edition of 25 May, it was stated in an editorial however, that Britain had nothing to fear from the Bologna Process, responding to the Prague summit of ministers of education: ‘The United Kingdom is being asked to give little or nothing away. There is no centrally imposed agenda, no surrender of national control over degree structures, no prescribed formula for quality assurance. Academic content is not an issue.’<sup>468</sup>

Although this also applied to the Tuning project, one might nevertheless sense some tension in this respect when compared to the main aims and objectives that it published at its start, which were more articulated than the four included in the original project proposal<sup>469</sup>:

- To bring about a high level of Europe-wide convergence in Higher Education in the five main subject areas by defining commonly accepted professional and learning outcomes;
- To develop professional profiles and desired outcomes, in terms of knowledge, skills and competences in the five subject areas;
- To facilitate transparency in the educational structures and to further innovation through communication of experience and identification of good practice;
- To create five European networks that can be present examples of good practice, encouraging innovation and quality in the joint reflection and exchange, also for other disciplines;

<sup>468</sup> The Times Higher Education Supplement, 25 May 2001, International News, 11 and Opinion, 14. Tuning Archive.

<sup>469</sup> Tuning Educational Structure in Europe, *Document 1*, 4 May 2001, White pages, 4.

- To develop and exchange information in relation to the development of curricula in these five areas, and develop a model curriculum structure for each area, enhancing the recognition and European integration of diplomas;
- To build bridges between this network of universities and other appropriate qualified bodies in order to produce convergence in the five subject areas;
- To elaborate a methodology for analysing common elements and areas of specificity and diversity, and how to tune them;
- To associate other subject areas where a similar process can be incorporated through synergy;
- To act in a co-ordinated manner with all the actors involved in the process of tuning of educational structures (Ministries, Conferences of Rectors and Universities).

These objectives were kept in place during the running period of Tuning I, but were made more concrete over time. This also applied to the terminology that was developed, as well as the structure by introducing four lines of analyses as part of the methodology to understand curricula and make them comparable:

1. Generic competences
2. Subject specific competences
3. Role of ECTS as a transfer and accumulation system
4. Approaches to learning, teaching, assessment and performance in relation to quality assurance and control.

At first instance, a differentiation had been made between general and subject specific skills (line 1) on the one hand and 'knowledge/core curricula/content (line 2) on the other.<sup>470</sup> This did not work, because it was not sufficiently clear. Therefore it was decided to re-name the first two lines in generic competences and subject specific competences respectively. The fourth line was split in later years, by giving quality assurance its own line (no. 5). The second line listed above was consequently rephrased as follows: 'To develop professional profiles and desired learning outcomes and competences in terms of generic and subject specific-related competences including skills, knowledge and content in the seven subject areas'.<sup>471</sup>

## Positioning Tuning

To avoid any misunderstandings about its position, in the Final Report of Phase One, published in January 2003, it was felt necessary to make clear what

<sup>470</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Document 2*, 21-22 September 2001, White pages, 2.

<sup>471</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 25.

Tuning represented and what it did not: ‘Tuning seeks to << tune >> educational structures in Europe, by opening a debate aimed to identify and exchange information and to improve European collaboration in the development of quality, effectiveness and transparency. Tuning does not seek to develop any unified, prescriptive or definitive European curricula, nor does it want to create any rigid set of subject specifications, to restrict or direct educational content and/or to end the rich diversity of European higher education. Furthermore, it does not want to restrict the independence of academics and subject specialists or to damage local and national autonomy’.<sup>472</sup> It simply looked for points of convergence and common understanding, to protect the rich diversity of European education being paramount. This was underpinned by the fact that besides the felt need to developing professional profiles, academic profiles were brought into play. From 2007 a disclaimer would be included in every Tuning publication reflecting its position.

The same Final Report also gives clarity about the terminology that was gradually developed as part of its methodology. To understand curricula and to make these comparable, the ‘concept’ of learning outcomes and competences was introduced. By using ‘concept’ in a singular form, it expressed that these two notions were seen as being closely related. In terms of the definition agreed: ‘by learning outcomes we mean the set of competences including knowledge, understanding and skills a learner is expected to know/understand/demonstrate after completion of a process of learning – short or long. In the glossary of the report this was simplified towards: ‘statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning’. Today, having accepted the notion that the ability to demonstrate is required to prove knowledge and understanding the ‘and/or’ has been limited to ‘and’. This revised definition is now widely used, not only in Europe, but also in other regions of the world.<sup>473</sup> In chapter 5, *Competences and learning outcomes: A panacea for understanding the (new) role of Higher Education?*, the choices made regarding the use of terminology and its related concepts have already been explained in more detail.

By aligning the concepts of competences, learning outcomes and workload based credits Tuning offered a unique conceptual framework to make degree programmes and periods of studies comparable and compatible. By doing so, it formulated an answer to the frustrations developed in the ECTS expert group to overcome

<sup>472</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>473</sup> See for an overview of definitions defined and applied by eight organizations/initiatives including Tuning: Stephen Adam, *Using Learning Outcomes. A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing ‘learning outcomes’ at the local, national and international levels*. Prepared for United Kingdom Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh Conference Centre) Edinburgh. Scotland. London: University of Westminster, June 2004, 4. Retrieved from: [http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol\\_semin/Edinburgh/S\\_ADam\\_back\\_pap.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/S_ADam_back_pap.pdf)

the lack of recognition. The solution was sought – as we have seen – in the concept of ‘convergence of educational structures’. By making this choice it aligned the project to the realm of convergence theory, discussed in chapter 1. Although the term convergence is not used in the Bologna Declaration, the need for convergence as its driver was stressed from the very start as we have seen. Over time Tuning applied the term less often – preferring the wording ‘tuning’ instead – and left it in particular to the system level, the project itself focussing on structures and curricular reform. This is shown by the description of the term included in the different Tuning reports: ‘convergence involves the voluntary recognition and adoption of general policies for the achievement of common goals. Convergence in the architecture of national educational systems is pursued in the Bologna process’.

By applying the concept of competences as its methodology the following seven contributions regarding the reform process could be identified at the end of 2002 and were outlined in the final report of phase 1.<sup>474</sup> Anno 2018 each of these still stand:

a) *Further transparency in academic and professional profiles in degrees and study programmes and a growing emphasis on outcomes*

Competences are perceived as a guiding principle for the composition of programmes. They allow programmes to have their own academic and professional profile. Transparency is facilitated when the set of competences to be developed is dynamic and responsive to employability and society and made explicit and public. The focus in this respect is on its outcomes to prepare students best for their future role. Competences accommodate the definition of measurable indicators which will promote accountability. Their use implies active involvement of the student in the learning process, individually and in groups, by preparing written assignments, offering presentations, obtaining organised feedback, etc. It also impacts the evaluation of student performances, moving from knowledge as the dominant (even the single) reference to (include) assessment methods centred on competences, capacities and processes requiring a variety of approaches to new assessment methods (portfolio, tutorial work, course work...) being used, as well as in situational learning.

b) *Development of the new paradigm of student-centred education and the need to focus on the management of knowledge*

Observing changes taking place in the teaching/learning paradigm, it is noted that approaches centred on the learner and the learning process are be-

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<sup>474</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 25-32.

coming increasingly important, involving a move from 'teaching-centred' to 'learning-centred education'. The focus on competences is fitting well in this trend. The previous paradigm implied an emphasis on the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. The interest in the development of competences in educational programmes is thought in accordance with an approach to education as primarily centred on the student and his/her capacity to learn, demanding more protagonism and higher level of involvement, 'since it is the student who ought to develop the capacity to handle original information and access and evaluate information in a more varied form (library, teacher, internet, etc.)'. As a consequence, it means a changing role of the teacher and a shift in educational activities and the organisation of learning.

c) *Growing demands of a lifelong learning society and more flexibility in the organisation of learning*

A knowledge society – also being a learning society – places higher education in a wider context: the continuum of lifelong learning. This is a setting where the individual needs to be able to handle knowledge, to update it, to select and weight what is appropriate for a particular context, to learn permanently, to understand what is learned in such a way that it can be adapted to new and rapidly changing situations. The growth of different modes of education (full time, part time...), changing contexts and diversity affect the pace or rhythm at which individuals and groups can take part in the educational process. This has an impact on the form and structure of programme design and delivery but also on the whole approach towards the organisation of learning, including (better) focused programmes, shorter courses, (more) flexible course structures, and (more) flexible moods of delivery of teaching, with the provision of more guidance and support. Employability, in the perspective of lifelong learning, is considered as best served through a diversity of approaches and course profiles, the flexibility of programmes with multiple exits and entrance points and the development of *generic competences*.

d) *Consideration for highest levels of employability and citizenship*

The relationship between competences and employment is a longstanding one. The search for a better way to predict successful performance in the work place, going beyond measurements of intelligence personality and knowledge, should be regarded as the starting point for programme design, implementation and delivery. This emphasis on work performance continues to be of vital importance. In the context of the Bologna Process a distinction should be made between the set of competences to be developed as part of the first and the

second cycle, the difference in level to be defined in terms of learning outcomes. The concept of *learning outcomes* in Tuning goes beyond employment also covering the demands and standards the academic community sets in relation to particular qualifications. There is no contrast here because as part of the learning experience graduates should be prepared to solve real time problems at their level of employment. Constant reflection on the dynamics of the disciplinary and related employability field should be part of programme implementation and enhancement. Besides these two elements – according to the Tuning philosophy – degree programmes should also take personal development (as a driver for learning) and boosting of citizenship into account, citizenship to be understood as civic and social engagement, that is being prepared to take up related responsibilities.

e) *Enhancement of the European dimension of Higher Education*

In the creation of the European Higher Education Area, higher education institution play a central role. How else can two main objectives of the Bologna Process be met, that is the development of easily readable and comparable degrees, and a system essentially based on three main cycles. This requires a shared methodology in which the nucleus is the identification of the most relevant competences to be developed as well as the articulation of levels. European networks of (disciplinary) experts play a central role in this respect. Their work should contribute to the development of common frameworks of qualifications, hence promoting understanding, clarity and the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area. These frameworks should serve as a basis for quality assurance and accreditation but also for the design, development, implementation and enhancement of individual study programmes. Degree programmes based on learning outcomes, in accordance with these frameworks, will increase transparency and be definitely a further asset for the encouragement and enhancement of mobility, not only of students, but particularly of graduates and professionals.

f) *Provision of a language more adequate for consultation with stakeholders*

A dynamic society based on change and variety of contexts requires a constant check on social demands for the definition of professional and academic profiles. This underlines the need for consultation, and constant update of information on adequacy. The language of competences, since it comes originally from outside higher education, can be considered appropriate for consultation and dialogue with groups not directly involved in academic life, and can contribute to the necessary reflection for the development of new



degrees and for permanent systems of updating existing ones. Competences articulate what is required for employability and are therefore the core of every job description. While learning objectives and outcomes is the language of higher education (institutions), competences (being competent) are that of society. According to the definition included in the Final Report of Phase 1 of the Tuning project '*competences represent a dynamic combination of attributes – with respect to knowledge and its application, to attitudes and responsibilities – that describe the learning outcomes of an educational programme, or how learners are able to perform at the end of an educational process*'. In 2005 this definition was simplified to 'competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities'.<sup>475</sup> Tuning requires a concrete language to be understood by all stakeholders to set up wide consultations to gather information in terms of possible trends and degrees of variety and change. These should serve as a basis for initiating a joint – transnational – discussion identifying communalities and differences between countries and stakeholder groups.

g) *Transferring the European Credit Transfer System into a Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

To facilitate credit transfer and recognition of periods of studies the development of a European credit system which is based on the notion of credit accumulation, is conditional. It is also a requirement for the development of one European Higher Education Area, acting as a pan-European one and accepted by all member states of the Bologna Process as such. Such a system should not only be based on the notion of student workload but needs to be linked to the concept of competences and learning outcomes as well. An agreed definition of these concepts is therefore essential. This also counts for the 'value' of credits. In ECTS defined as having a relative value reflecting the quantity of work each course as part of the total quantity of work required to complete a full academic year. In an accumulation system the value of credits has to be absolute, reflecting the official programme.<sup>476</sup> By defining learning outcomes at programme and module/unit level standards can be set with regard to the level of learning of subject specific competences (covering knowledge, understanding, skills and application) and generic competences to be achieved. ECTS credits should act as the building

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<sup>475</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao and Groningen, 2005, 32 and 379.

<sup>476</sup> Tuning discussion paper Educational structures, Workload, Credits and Learning Outcomes, in: *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Meeting Document 3*, Working documents, November 2001, 16 pp. Prepared by Robert Wagenaar. A first version of the paper was included in the *Tuning Meeting Document 2*. Working documents, 5-16.

blocks for underpinning the learning outcomes. Comparability and compatibility of programmes of studies require harmonized systems of higher education, but also comparable structure and agreed reference points at subject area level. In terms of structures one should take account of the organization and the length of the academic year. The construction of a European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System requires the development of a system of course type descriptors (core, related, optional) and (cycle) level descriptors and indicators. It also needs a transparent method to calculate student workload. The notional learning time should be used as its basis.

As part of Tuning phase 1, three strategic papers were prepared: 'Principles of a Pan-European Credit Accumulation Framework: Good Practice Guidelines'; 'Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits'; and 'The Length of Higher Education Degree Programmes in Europe: Contribution to the Debate by the Tuning Project'.<sup>477</sup> The discourse reflected in these papers was also input for the conference the EUA organized in cooperation with the Swiss Confederation Conference in October 2002 in Zürich, entitled: *Credit Transfer and Accumulation – the Challenge for Institutions and Students*<sup>478</sup>; the first two having already been endorsed at the fourth Tuning meeting which took place in March 2002.<sup>479</sup>

The debate about the development of ECTS has been discussed in more detail in chapter 4, entitled *Making the Jump. From a European credit transfer system towards a credit accumulation system*.

From the above it can be distilled that the concrete role Tuning saw for itself:

- involve academics in the Bologna Process at subject area level
- make higher education in Europe highly competitive at world level
- make students better employable
- enhance structures for mobility and recognition
- raise awareness about the importance of citizenship
- to develop a common language for all stakeholders
- introduce Europe wide the Learning Outcomes and Competences approach

<sup>477</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 43-48 and 213-251.

<sup>478</sup> Hosted by ETH Zürich on 11/12 October 2002. See for conclusions of the conference, the document 'Conclusions and Recommendations for Action', retrieved from: [https://media.ehea.info/file/ECTS\\_Zurich\\_2002/04/8/021011-12\\_ECTS\\_EUA\\_Zurich\\_Recommandations\\_576048.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/ECTS_Zurich_2002/04/8/021011-12_ECTS_EUA_Zurich_Recommandations_576048.pdf). See also the document: *The state of implementation of ECTS in Europe. A short survey carried out by EUA in co-operation with the ECTS/DS national coordinators*. December 2002, retrieved from: <http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EUA%20survey%200n%20ECTS.1068809056368.pdf>

<sup>479</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Meeting Document 4*, March 2002, pp. 119-141. Tuning Archive.

- raise awareness about the importance of generic competences besides subject specific ones
- promote the use of ECTS as a student workload based credit accumulation and transfer system
- raise awareness of the importance of quality in process and delivery
- respond to growing demands of a lifelong learning society requiring more flexibility and differentiation

It reads as a list of concrete actions and was meant as such. These items would come back in the hundreds of Tuning presentations which were offered over the years all over Europe and beyond.

In retrospect the main contribution of Tuning has been advocating the paradigm shift thought essential for reforming higher education programmes. It was by far the first transnational initiative of its size pursuing the change from staff-centred or expert-driven education to student-centred learning. The concept was – as we have seen earlier – only picked up in the London Communiqué of 2007 and more seriously described in the 2009 Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué. Tuning defines student-centred learning as *“an approach or system that supports the design of learning programmes which focus on learners’ achievements, accommodate different learners’ priorities and are consistent with reasonable students’ workload (i.e workload that is feasible within the duration of the learning programme). It accommodates for learners’ greater involvement in the choice of content, mode, pace and place of learning”*.<sup>480</sup> An additional innovation was linking the student-centred approach to the concept of profiling that promotes flexibility and diversity. It developed the following definition: *“A degree profile describes the specific characteristics of an educational programme or qualification in terms of features, learning outcomes and competences, following an agreed format”*.<sup>481</sup>

## Tuning model for developing, implementing and enhancing degree programmes

In 2005 as a result of a fine-tuning process which characterized its second phase Tuning was ready to present its robust model for designing, developing,

<sup>480</sup> Lokhoff, Jenneke, Bas Wegewijs, Katja Durkin, Robert Wagenaar, Julia González, Ann Katherine Isaacs, Luigi F. Donà dalle Rose and Mary Gobbi, eds., *A Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles. Including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes*. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague, 2010, 57.

<sup>481</sup> Ibidem, 52. A slightly more extended definition is included in Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Universities’ contribution to the Bologna Process. An introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. Bilbao and Groningen, 2008, 151.

implementing and delivering new study programmes and enhancing existing ones. These could be single programmes, as well as joint programmes offered by two or more higher education institutions. Joint is to be understood as fully integrated programmes leading to a multiple, a double or a joint diploma. In the case of a joint programme there should be additional concern regarding the commitment of partners, formal recognition in national contexts and agreement about the length of the programmes in terms of ECTS credits based on common learning outcomes and the student workload involved.

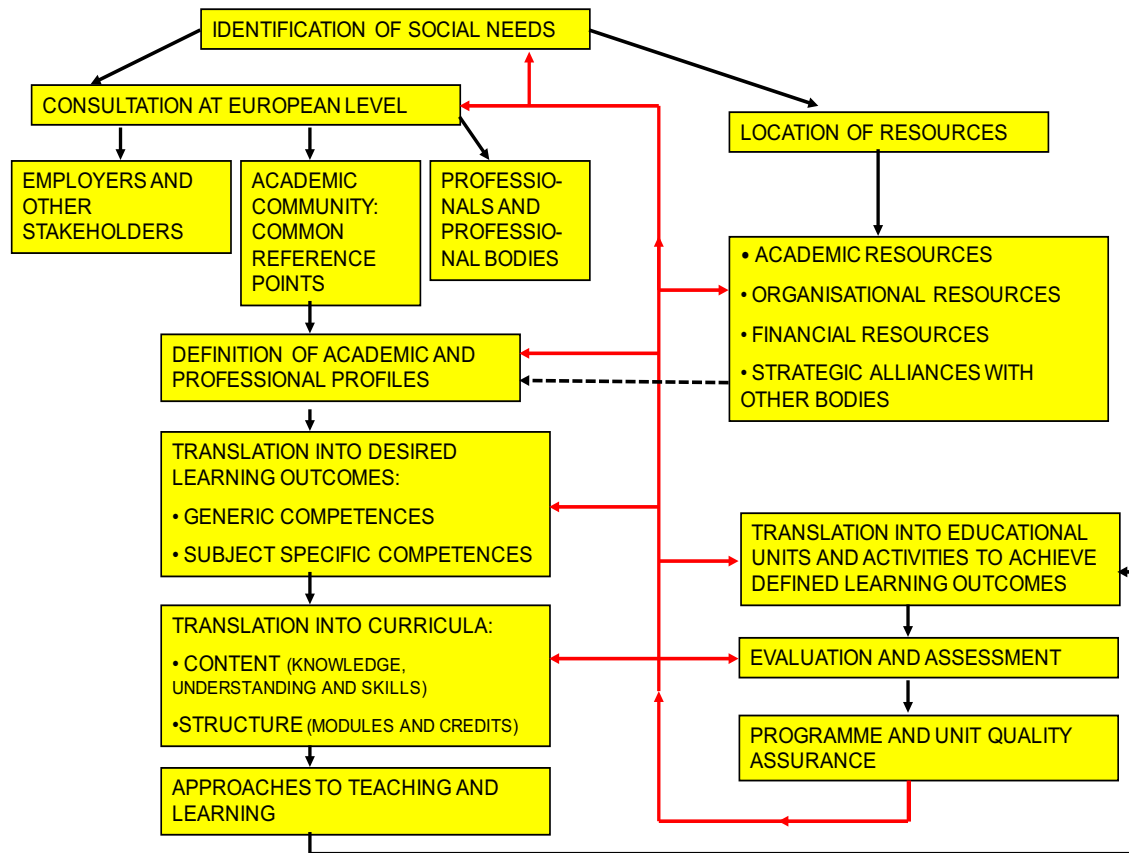
The Tuning model departs from the precondition that it should be simple and easy to understand. This was thought necessary because – as stated before – the vast majority of staff was never trained in any way for teaching and therefore was not acquainted with educational theory and methodology. Staff development programmes simply did not exist and/or were not tailored to either modern approaches and/or the academic field involved. During the first phase of the Tuning project (2001-2002) Tuning found out – to its regret – that academics from other subject areas than education showed (very) limited interest in the insights developed in education sciences and teacher training. This situation does not seem to have changed much since then.

The basis for the model, which then developed into a methodology, was a scheme – a step by step approach – included in the Tuning Phase 1 Final report which shows clearly the basic philosophy developed for preparing programmes according to an agreed format. Because it was finished just before the printing of the publication, it was not further articulated in that publication.<sup>482</sup> It is worth publishing it here again – in a slightly modified form for reasons of clarity – because it offers the skeleton that subsequently was used to develop a multiple-step approach. The ‘Tuning model for European Comparable Degrees’ is still accurate today.

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<sup>482</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 51.

Image 3: Tuning model for European Comparable Degrees

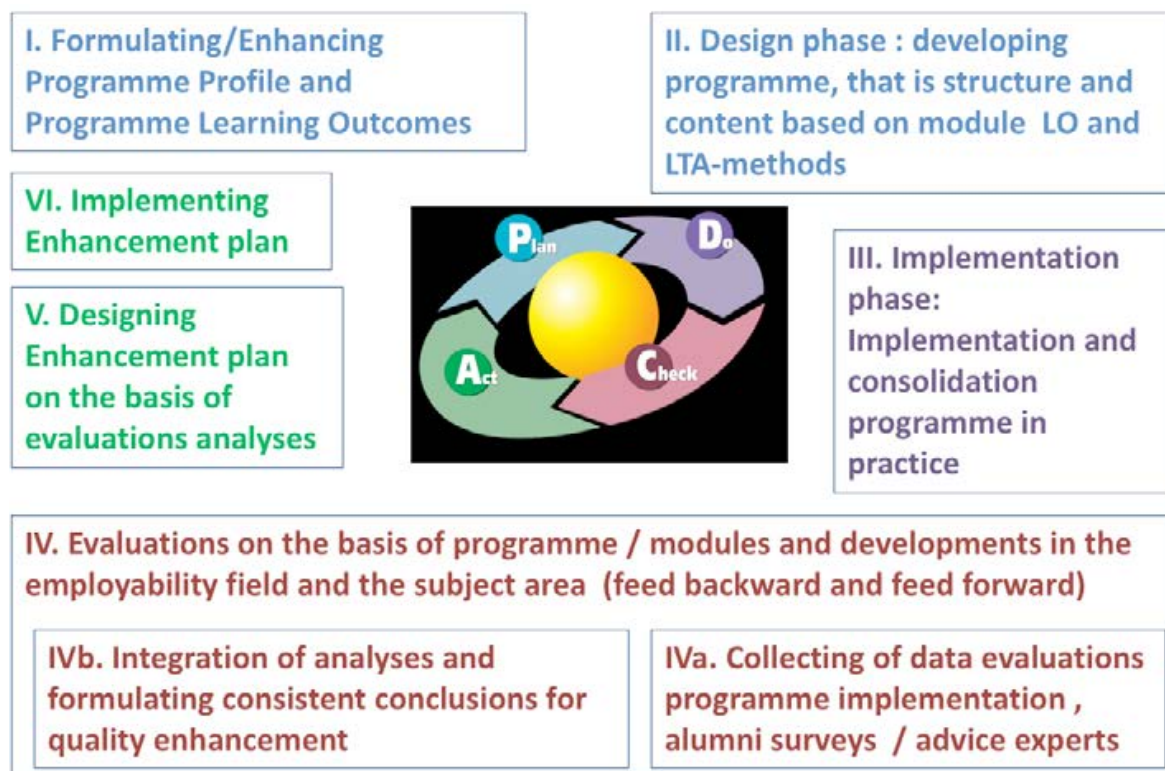


In this image it is made explicit that study programmes should only be offered when a new need is identified or existing demands are served, and the required resources are available. The order of steps is visualised by the *black arrows*. The *grey arrows* reflect the feedback or evaluation process, evolving most steps made. These elements can also be traced in what finally became a ten-step approach in 2010<sup>483</sup>, which was a re-phrasing of the original model of eight steps published in 2005.<sup>484</sup> It is included at the end of chapter 7 in this book. At a later moment the model was turned into a quality assurance model based on the well-known Deming PDCA circle, which is shown below.

<sup>483</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, 60-62.

<sup>484</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005, 29-30.

Image 4: Tuning Dynamic Quality Assurance Cycle



Based on the W. Edwards Deming PDCA/ PDSA cycle.<sup>485</sup>

To offer support for the development of relevant and high quality degree programmes two additional tools were defined: a Tuning List of Key Questions for Programme Design and Programme Delivery, Maintenance and Evaluation in the Framework of the Bologna Reform and a Tuning Checklist for Curriculum Evaluation.<sup>486</sup> Both lists are included as an annex ( 2 and 3) to chapter 7 of this publication. The Tuning methodology for designing, implementing and enhancing degree programmes is discussed in more detail in that chapter: *Higher education professional staff development and the Tuning approach: strategies for designing academic programmes.*

<sup>485</sup> See for background information in the Plan Do Check Act (PDCAo cycle (1950-51) and the evolved Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle (1986-1993) which introduced the concept of continues quality management: Ronald Moen, Foundation and History of the PDSA Cycle. Retrieved from: [https://deming.org/uploads/paper/PDSA\\_History\\_Ron\\_Moen.pdf](https://deming.org/uploads/paper/PDSA_History_Ron_Moen.pdf)

Nowadays it is also widely used in the field of HE as a basic quality assurance instrument.

<sup>486</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process. An introduction.* 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. Bilbao-Groningen, 2008, annex 1 and 2, 135-146.

## Subject Area Reference Points: identifying core components

Besides developing a methodology to implement the three cycle system in practice at the level of higher education institutions and their programmes, another big task taken on by Tuning was defining reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes. For this purpose, working groups were established which served as platforms for reflection and discussion. In first instance seven in the framework of the Tuning project phase I, with an additional two in phase II, and complemented with others based in Thematic Network Programmes at later dates. The first task was to prepare a list of 'subject specific competences' for each group and to reach consensus on a list of generic competence common for all groups.

For preparing the list of subject specific competences the following procedure was applied which consisted of four phases, which can be characterized as 'compiling', 'storming', 'norming' and 'composing'.<sup>487</sup> Phase 1, 'compiling', was reserved for mapping. That is collecting information about the 'territory' and organisation of the subject area, the outline of existing programmes focussing on content and structure and, if applicable, constraints. Also the employability field was mapped, identifying typical occupations and listing (potential) employers of graduates. The list was necessary to survey employers. First findings showed that definitions of the discipline proved to a certain extent to be nationally bound. It was also found that the traditional disciplines selected proved less mono-disciplinary than expected, although there were differences between countries.<sup>488</sup>

Phase 2, 'storming', showed intense discussions and exchange of opinions, the focal point being the question whether sufficient common ground could be found to define a 'core curriculum'. The term itself was perceived differently by the academics involved in the project and therefore subject of discussion, with different meanings between countries and subject areas. The groups identified similarities, analogies, and differences in their existing systems and programmes. As part of this phase a list of competences was defined that was thought essential to the discipline. In other words, the typical characteristics which gave it its identity: what makes an earth science programme an earth science programme, etc. In this process the so-called subject benchmark statements prepared by UK disciplinary experts for the British Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) were used as input. These papers, covering originally only 'bachelor with honours' pro-

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<sup>487</sup> Tuning Educational Structure in Europe, *Meeting Document Closing Conference Brussels*, 31 May 2002, 45; Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 37-38.

<sup>488</sup> Tuning Educational Structure in Europe, *Meeting Document Closing Conference Brussels*, 31 May 2002, 45-103; Tuning Educational Structures, *Document 5*, 31 May – 1 June 2002.

grammes were published from 2000 on, offering a description of the area and identifying the related required competences and learning outcomes.<sup>489</sup> In 2002 ENQA took the initiative to establish the Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP) building on the experiences of the Tuning I project and the Joint Quality Initiative.<sup>490</sup>

It is interesting to note that some of the subject specific competences defined by the working groups of experts, overlapped with competences which are typically seen as generic and thought essential for its academic field. Subject areas were free to compose and organise the different subject specific competences. As was mentioned earlier, in phase 1 only academics were consulted on subject specific competences, making a distinction between the first and second cycle and, in the case of history, between history degree programmes, programmes in which history covers a substantial part and history course units offered to students of other subject areas. Later subject specific competences were also surveyed among the other stakeholder groups: employers, graduates and senior students.<sup>491</sup>

In phase 3, dubbed ‘norming’ the outcomes of both the results of the consultations of the generic competences and the subject specific competences were discussed and analysed. With regard to the subject specific ones, academic staff completing the questionnaires had been asked to grade both the importance and the achievement of each competence from their individual perspective. Those answering the questionnaire were also asked to identify gaps in the list, essential subject specific competences missing. Although not intended as a survey meeting scholarly standards, the data offered crucial information for identifying what was shared, diverse and dynamic in a subject area. Important at this stage was to scrutinize communalities and differences to develop a common understanding. The material also allowed to identify the most relevant generic competences for

<sup>489</sup> Quality Assurance Agency benchmark papers limited to ‘bachelors with honours’: *Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000; *General Business and Management*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000; *Education Studies*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000. *History*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000; *Physics, Astronomy and Astrophysics*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2002. The most recent editions of these documents have been published from 2014 to February 2017. These are more comprehensive than the original ones.

<sup>490</sup> European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Transnational European Evaluation Project. Methodological Reflections. ENQA Occasional Papers 6. Retrieved from: [http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/TEEPmethod\(1\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/TEEPmethod(1).pdf). The TEEP project was co-financed by the European Commission.

<sup>491</sup> Pablo Beneitone and Edurne Bartolomé, Global generic competences with local ownership: a comparative study from the perspective of graduates in four world regions, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education. Competence-based learning: a global perspective*. Volume 1, No.2, May 2014, pp. 43-74/ pp. 303-334.



each subject area from the list of 30. Although there were generic competences identified which were perceived to be of high importance for all subject areas, there were differences between subject areas, as well as countries. By comparing the data with other relevant information and the collected experiences of the group an initial framework was made of reference points common for each of the subject areas.<sup>492</sup>

Phase 4, 'composing' proved to be the most time consuming. In the Tuning Europe project it required the Tuning II and III projects, covering the period 2003-2006. This phase was meant to transfer the findings into a document which should serve as the reference for each degree programme in the academic field concerned. For this phase a template was developed to guarantee completeness of findings. It had 6 sections, (1) an introduction; (2) degree profiles covering a. the mapping of typical degrees and b. an overview of typical occupations; (3) level cycle descriptors; (4) student workload and ECTS; (5) good practices of teaching, learning and assessment strategies and approaches and (6) quality enhancement.<sup>493</sup> In an annex to this chapter the most recent version (2016) of the *Template for a summary of Tuning subject area findings* is included. In this template the mapping of degrees and overview of occupations have their own sections.

## Generic competences

Tuning has been one of the first – in an international context – to point to the fact that in a dynamic society with high mobility in employment, generic or transferable competences are of great significance. This implies that for every degree profile choices have to be made in relation to the most suitable ones in relation to the intended outcomes of the programme.

As mentioned before, as part of its methodology to develop a useful and current set of reference points, Tuning consulted graduates, employers, academics and later also students in a structured way to identify the most relevant generic competences, in general and per academic field. As part of the Tuning Europe project I to IV two consultations were organized for each of the 9 groups that were involved. For Business Administration, Chemistry, Earth Science/Ge-

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<sup>492</sup> Tuning Educational Structures, *Meeting Document 4*, Working documents, offers an outcome of the surveys on generic and subject specific competences, 5-66 and the Discussion Papers for Line 2: Knowledge/ Core Curricula/ Content, 67-118. Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*. Line 2 Subject Specific Competences, 101-211.

<sup>493</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005, 39-43.

ology, Education Sciences, History, Mathematics and Physics the first survey took place in 2001-2002 and 2004 for the subject areas European Studies and Nursing that were included from 2003. A second survey took place in 2008. During and after that period many more consultation surveys were organized in other world regions. And although the list of questions was accommodated for each of these regions, the system and approach applied was kept the same over the years.

The Tuning consultation on generic competences was well prepared. As is stated in the final report of phase 1, over twenty studies in the field of generic skills and competences were analysed for constructing the proposal. It resulted in a long list of 85, which was limited to 29 and categorized in three clusters: instrumental competences, interpersonal competences and systemic competences. Both the identification, the selection and the classification was an arbitrary process, but well thought through.<sup>494</sup> The proposal of the Tuning coordinating team was discussed at the first Tuning meeting in May 2001. It led to minor adjustments before being distributed.<sup>495</sup> All generic competences included in the final list of 30 are work-related, which means useful in a work-based environment.

The classification applied allowed for involving and balancing different types of generic competences. *Instrumental competences* being cognitive abilities, methodological capacities, technological skills and linguistic skills; *interpersonal competences* being individual abilities and social skills, and the highest level: *systemic competences*. The latter category, presuming prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences, to oversee system-wide developments and having the capability to respond and act accordingly.<sup>496</sup>

The generic competences list of 2001 and the list of 2008 differ slightly. The phrasing of competences was further enhanced in 2010.<sup>497</sup> This is the list which is currently used as a basic reference document for consultations in other parts of the world. In 2008 and 2010 competences were partly rephrased or combined

<sup>494</sup> Sjur Bergan, *Qualifications, Introduction to a concept*. Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, 2007, 58-61. Bergan analyses the list and the classification applied and notices some overlap and suggests a slightly alternative ordering would have been possible, not being better.

<sup>495</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 70-71.

<sup>496</sup> The classification has been applied or quoted since in scholarly papers and books. To give some (more recent) examples: Sarah Kniel, *Evaluating Intercultural Learning: Developing Key Skills Through the International Dukenet Markstrat Programme*, Diss. Kassel, 2009, 95-96.; Marta Peris-Ortiz, Jose M. Merigo Lindahl, eds., *Sustainable Learning in Higher Education: Developing Competencies for the Global Market Place*, Dordrecht (Springer), 2015, 39-40; Amparo Alcina, eds., *Teaching and Learning Terminology: New Strategies and Methods*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia (Benjamin), 2011, 110; Demetrios G. Sampson, Pedro Isaias, Dirk Ifenthaler, Michael Spector, eds., *Ubiquitous and Mobile Learning in the Digital Age*, Dordrecht (Springer), 2013, 141-142.

<sup>497</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, Bilbao, Groningen and The Hague, 2010. Annex 2, List of Generic Competences, 63-64.

compared to the list of 2001 to limit misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Also one competence was completely replaced; no list and no formulation is perfect. 26 of the competences listed in 2008 were similar or comparable to the ones listed in 2001. These are indicated below with their number following the competence. The numbers added in the current list refer to the 2001 list. The competences printed in *Italics* in the scheme are the deviant ones.

*Scheme 1: Overview of Generic competences surveyed*

Generic Competences list 2001	Generic Competences list 2008	Generic Competences current list
<b>Instrumental competences</b>	<b>Instrumental competences</b>	<b>Instrumental competences</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capacity for analysis and synthesis</li> <li>2. Capacity for organisation and planning</li> <li>3. Basic general knowledge</li> <li>4. Grounding in basic knowledge of the profession</li> <li>5. Oral and written communication in your native language</li> <li>6. Knowledge of a second language</li> <li>7. Elementary computing skills</li> <li>8. Information management skills (ability to retrieve and analyse information from different sources)</li> <li>9. Problem solving</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ability for abstract thinking, analysis and synthesis (1)</li> <li>2. Ability to plan and manage time (2)</li> <li>3. Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession (3/4)</li> <li>4. Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in native language (5)</li> <li>5. Ability to communicate in a second language (6)</li> <li>6. Skills in the use of information and communications technologies (7)</li> <li>7. Ability to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources (8)</li> <li>8. Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems (9)</li> <li>9. Ability to make reasoned decisions (10)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ability for abstract and analytical thinking, and synthesis of ideas (1)</li> <li>2. Ability to plan and manage time (2)</li> <li>3. Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession (3/4)</li> <li>4. Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in first language (5)</li> <li>5. Ability to communicate in a second (foreign) language (6)</li> <li>6. Ability to use information and communication technologies (7)</li> <li>7. Ability to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources (8)</li> <li>8. Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems (9)</li> <li>9. Ability to make reasoned decisions (10)</li> </ol>

Generic Competences list 2001	Generic Competences list 2008	Generic Competences current list
<b>Interpersonal competences</b>	<b>Interpersonal competences</b>	<b>Interpersonal competences</b>
10. Decision-making 11. Critical and self-critical abilities 12. Teamwork 13. Interpersonal skills 14. <i>Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team</i> 15. Ability to communicate with experts in other fields. 16. Appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism 17. Ability to work in an international context	10. Ability to be critical and self-critical (11) 11. Ability to work in a team (12) 12. Interpersonal and interaction skills (13) 13. Ability to communicate with non-experts of one's field (15) 14. Appreciation of and respect for diversity and multiculturalism (16) 15. Ability to work in an international context (17) 16. Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning (18) 17. <i>Ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues</i>	10. Ability to be critical and self-critical (11) 11. Ability to work in a team (12) 12. Ability to interact with others in a constructive manner, even when dealing with difficult issues (13) 13. Ability to interact constructively with others regardless of background and culture and respecting diversity (14/16) 14. Ability to communicate key information from one's discipline or field to non-experts (15) 15. Ability to work in an international context (17) 16. Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning (18) 17. <i>Ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues</i>

Generic Competences list 2001	Generic Competences list 2008	Generic Competences current list
Systemic competences	Systemic competences	Systemic competences
18. Ethical commitment 19. Capacity for applying knowledge in practice 20. Research skills 21. Capacity to learn 22. Capacity for generating new ideas (creativity) 23. Capacity to adapt to new situations 24. Leadership 25. <i>Understanding of cultures and customs of other countries</i> 26. Ability to work autonomously 27. Project design and management 28. Initiative and entrepreneurial spirit 29. Concern for quality 30. Will to succeed	18. Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations (19) 19. Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level (20) 20. Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning (21) 21. Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity) (22) 22. Ability to adapt to and act in new situations (23) 23. Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals (24) 24. Ability to work autonomously (26) 25. Ability to design and manage projects (27) 26. Spirit of enterprise, ability to take initiative (28) 27. Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced (29) 28. Determination and perseverance in the tasks given and responsibilities taken (30) 29. <i>Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness</i> 30. <i>Commitment to the conservation of the environment</i> 31. <i>Commitment to safety</i>	18. Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations (19) 19. Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level (20) 20. Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning (21) 21. Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity) (22) 22. Ability to adapt to and act in new situations and cope under pressure (23) 23. Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals (24) 24. Ability to work autonomously (26) 25. Ability to design and manage projects (27) 26. Ability to take the initiative and to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and intellectual curiosity (28) 27. Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced (29) 28. Commitment to tasks and responsibilities (30) 29. <i>Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness</i> 30. <i>Commitment to conservation of the environment</i> 31. <i>Commitment to health, well-being and safety</i>

The lists were transformed into questionnaires for the different stakeholder groups completed with a clarification and an invitation letter. The whole set was translated into the eleven official languages of the EU. Distribution of the questionnaire was taken on by the higher education institutions involved in the project. To obtain valid results, each higher education institution was expected to approach 150 graduates (chosen randomly; graduated since 3 to 5 years), 30 employers and 15 academics. In 2001 100 out of 105 of the higher education inner circle institutions participated in the exercise covering 7 subject areas, involving 16 countries. In 2008, covering 9 subject areas, 27 countries were involved. The main difference between the surveys of 2001 and 2008 was that in the latter one, also senior students were surveyed. In 2001 the survey was still based on paper questionnaires, in 2008 it was computer based using different access codes to the questionnaire for every institution and stakeholders group. Because it was paper based in 2001, an estimated response rate could be calculated, which proved to be approximately one-third for of all three stakeholder groups surveyed. In 2008, when 140 institutions were involved in Tuning, the response rate was much lower for both graduates and employers taking the respective minimum numbers to survey as a basis to be respected. Meeting these numbers proved not to be feasible for many institutions. In terms of the actual numbers of completed questionnaires the following overview can be offered. Both in 2001 and 2008 the response numbers were reasonably well spread over the different subject area groups.<sup>498</sup>

*Scheme 2: Number of responses to Tuning surveys*

Year of survey	Employers	Graduates	Academics	Students
2001	944	5183	998	–
2008	879	1948	2041	2219

The consultation was based – in both cases – on different variables, that is, first:

- the degree of importance: the relevance of the competence, in the opinion of the stakeholder (for work in their profession);

<sup>498</sup> See for a detailed overview including response percentages: Tuning Project 1, Document 4 (March 2002), working papers, 5. Details about the response numbers in 2001: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*, 78-79. For 2008: Tuning Consultation 2008 on Competences. Presentation of outcomes by Jon Paul Laka, University of Deusto (ppt), Tuning Dissemination Conference II. Competence-based learning: the approach for the future? Brussels, 12 June 2008 and Pablo Beneitone and Edurne Barrolomé, Global generic competences with local ownership.

- the level of achievement: the achievement of this competence as a result of having taken this university degree.

To evaluate these two variables, the respondents had to use a scale: 1 = none; 2 = weak; 3 = moderate; 4 = strong.

In addition, stakeholders were asked to rank the importance of the five generic and the five subject specific competences. The competence that was ranked highest in the survey was allocated five points, four for the second and so on, with one point for the last in the selection. If the competence was not chosen in the survey, it scored zero points.

The well-known ‘importance – performance analysis’ matrix of Martilla and James<sup>499</sup> was applied to evaluate the outcomes distinguishing four quadrants or categories: 1. High importance, low achievement; 2. Low importance, low achievement; 3. Low importance, high achievement; and 4. High importance, high achievement. To analyse the data the methodology of *cluster sampling*<sup>500</sup> was used, clustering the responses per university to obtain more trustworthy results and using as a follow-up step multi-level modelling. This allowed for comparisons between higher education institutions, countries, subject areas and the aggregated level of all subject areas.

Although this is not the place to discuss the outcomes of the questionnaires in detail, it is relevant to offer some indications of the generated outcomes. The most interesting one are the Spearman correlations between the different stakeholders based on the *ranking* of generic competences. The 2001 outcomes show a substantial gap between employers and graduates on the one hand and academics on the other. This gap proved to be largely bridged in the 2008 survey, at least with regard to academics and graduates.

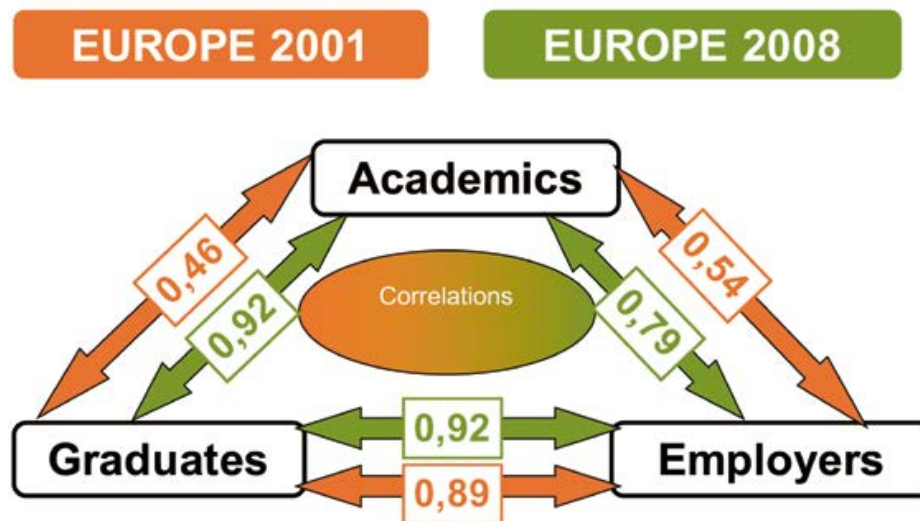
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<sup>499</sup> J. Martilla and J. James, Importance-performance analysis, in: *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Jan., 1977), pp. 77-79. See also: Roger Lewis, Importance-performance analysis. *Australian Journal of Engineering Education*, 2004. Online publication 2004-02:

<http://www.aeee.com.au/journal/2004/lewis04.pdf>

<sup>500</sup> Cluster sampling: Survey method in which groups (clusters) of sampling units (and not individual units) are selected from a population for analysis. See: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/cluster-sampling.html>

Image 5: Spearman correlation between stakeholder groups



It is not too bold to state this image reflects reality. Just to give a striking example in this respect. ‘Basic general knowledge’ was ranked highest by the academics in 2001 and ended up at place 12 for graduates and employers. Its *importance* was rated at 3.07 by graduates and at 3.06 by employers while its *level of achievement* was rated respectively at 3.15 and 3.08 at a 4 points scale. This is quite exceptional, because for all other 29 competences the level of achievement was estimated lower to much lower than the importance.<sup>501</sup> It offers a clear indication that in 2001 the focus of academics was still very much on knowledge acquisition and transfer.

In the 2008 survey the competence ‘Basic general knowledge’ was combined with the competence ‘Grounding in basic knowledge of the profession’ to ‘Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession’. This competence scored in terms of *ranking* in 2008 place 3 or 4 for all stakeholder groups, including the students. This seems clearly due to its formulation. It is consistent with the rating of the (2001) competence ‘Grounding in basic knowledge of the profession’; importance according to graduates and employers respectively 3.11 and 3.00 and level of achievement respectively 2.36 and 2.42.<sup>502</sup> This is fully in alignment with the competence ‘Capacity for applying knowledge in practice’ (2001)/ ‘Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations’ (2008). It shows one of the largest gaps of all competences surveyed in both 2001 and 2008

<sup>501</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Document 3*, working papers Summary of the Graduate Questionnaires, November 2001, 11; Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Document 3*, working papers Summary of the Employers Questionnaires, November 2001, 6

<sup>502</sup> Ibidem.



between perceived *importance* (rated around 3.5 at average by employers and graduates) and perceived *level of achievement* (rated around 2.5 at average by employers and graduates).<sup>503</sup>

The most important generic competences identified in 2001 by employers and graduates, in terms of perceived importance were: ‘capacity for analysis and synthesis’, ‘capacity for applying knowledge in practice’, ‘capacity to learn’, ‘problem solving’, ‘capacity to adapt to new situations’ and for graduates ‘elementary computing skills’ and ‘information management skills’ and ‘ability to work autonomously’ (all three 3.5). For the employers also ‘teamwork’ and ‘concern for quality’ were singled out as being important. It is interesting to note that typical academic competences such as ‘capacity for analysis and synthesis’ and ‘capacity to learn’ were also scored high by employers and graduates.

It is fair to state that the outcomes in 2001 were very revealing and informative and came as a surprise and a shock for many of the academics involved in Tuning. The main message that was digested from the surveys was the expressed need in society for graduates with better developed generic competences. Although doing well in terms of the acquisition of knowledge of and insight into the subject area, students did less well than thought necessary in developing ‘abstract thinking, analysing and synthesizing skills’ (seen by the respondents as the most important competence) as well as ‘applying knowledge in practice’, ‘learning abilities’, ‘problem solving’ and ‘written and oral communication skills’. The latter two had weak achievement, 2.8 and 2.5 respectively.<sup>504</sup>

The consultation offered the insight that generic competences were much higher valued by both graduates and employers than by academics. It also showed a substantial mismatch for many competences between perceived importance and level of achievement. Most competences ended up in the quadrant high importance, low achievement.<sup>505</sup> This meant that in the perception of both graduates and employers these were not sufficiently trained/ developed in the setting of the degree programmes.

The 2008 survey shows more consistency between the then four stakeholder groups, including students, besides graduates, employers and academics. In terms of *ranking* ‘Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations’, ‘Ability for abstract thinking, analysis and synthesis’, ‘Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems’, ‘Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession’, ‘Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning’ and

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<sup>503</sup> Idem.

<sup>504</sup> Idem.

<sup>505</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Document 3, working papers Summary of the Graduate Questionnaires, November 2001, 13; Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Document 3, working papers Summary of the Employers Questionnaires, November 2001, 8.

‘Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)’ are identified as the most important generic competences. For employers, graduates and students also ‘Ability to plan and manage time’ and ‘Ability to work in a team’ are perceived as being quite relevant in the work place. Academics ranked these competences considerably lower. Employers also ranked ‘Ability to adapt to and act in new situations’ among the important set of competences in the world of work. The outcomes of the graduate survey show, in addition to the one for ‘Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations’ (3.68 versus 2.54) a considerable gap between importance and level of achievement for ‘Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems’ (3.60 versus 2.79), ‘Ability to plan and manage time’ (3.48 versus 2.49), ‘Ability to adapt to and act in new situations’ (3.44 versus 2.45), ‘Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)’ (3.36 versus 2.43), ‘Ability to design and manage projects’ (3.21 versus 2.30) and ‘Spirit of enterprise, ability to take initiative’ (3.12 versus 2.21).<sup>506</sup> It is not much different for the other stakeholders as is shown in the following table.

*Scheme 3: Tuning Survey 2008: Comparison between Importance and Achievement*

Competence	Academics		Graduates		Students		Employers	
	Imp.	Achiev.	Imp.	Achiev.	Imp.	Achiev.	Imp.	Achiev.
Ability for abstract thinking, analysis and synthesis	3.72	2.95	3.55	2.97	3.48	2.90	3.46	2.86
Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations	3.63	2.67	<b>3.68</b>	<b>2.54</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>2.56</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>2.54</b>
Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems	3.61	2.66	3.60	2.79	3.59	2.84	3.58	2.70
Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in native language	3.61	2.79	3.50	2.80	3.48	2.84	3.52	2.81
Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning	3.60	2.78	3.49	2.93	3.46	2.89	3.49	2.90
Knowledge and understanding of the subject and ...	3.60	2.98	3.41	2.82	3.49	2.86	3.42	2.81
Ability to search for, process and analyse information ...	3.56	2.81	3.46	3.03	3.42	2.99	3.40	2.91
Ability to work autonomously	3.54	2.89	3.51	3.11	3.54	3.09	3.46	2.90
Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)	<b>3.44</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>2.43</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>2.45</b>

<sup>506</sup> Tuning Survey 2008 – Generic Competences – General Results, 26-78. Tuning Archive.

Competence	Academics		Graduates		Students		Employers	
	Imp.	Achiev.	Imp.	Achiev.	Imp.	Achiev.	Imp.	Achiev.
Ability to be critical and self-critical (critical reflection)	3.42	2.48	3.40	2.62	3.34	2.64	3.29	2.49
Ability to make reasoned decisions	3.40	2.58	3.49	2.64	3.48	2.71	3.50	2.60
Determination and perseverance in the tasks given and ...	3.36	2.58	3.47	2.80	3.46	2.79	3.52	2.71
Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work ...	3.33	2.53	3.38	2.72	3.38	2.71	3.43	2.64
Ability to communicate in a second language	<b>3.32</b>	<b>2.31</b>	3.21	2.23	3.26	2.28	3.10	2.30
Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level	3.31	2.64	3.06	2.74	3.14	2.68	2.84	2.72
Skills in the use of information and communication technology	3.30	2.75	3.36	2.58	3.33	2.64	3.33	2.68
Ability to plan and manage time	3.28	2.44	3.48	2.49	3.42	2.55	<b>3.47</b>	<b>2.39</b>
Ability to adapt to and act in new situations	3.26	2.40	3.44	2.45	3.40	2.51	<b>3.49</b>	<b>2.49</b>
Ability to work in a team	3.26	2.62	3.41	2.75	3.44	2.89	3.52	2.73
Ability to work in an international context	3.20	2.38	3.07	2.34	3.21	2.41	3.01	2.41
Interpersonal and interaction skills	3.17	2.51	3.34	2.58	3.28	2.60	3.35	2.54
Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning	3.14	2.40	3.05	2.43	3.05	2.46	3.09	2.53
Ability to design and manage projects	3.10	2.19	3.21	2.30	3.22	2.42	3.25	2.37
Ability to motivate people and move towards common ...	3.05	2.16	<b>3.21</b>	<b>2.19</b>	3.17	2.27	<b>3.30</b>	<b>2.26</b>
Ability to communicate with non-experts in one's field	3.02	2.19	3.08	2.18	3.06	2.22	3.09	2.25
Appreciation of and respect for diversity and multiculturalism	3.00	2.49	3.00	2.57	3.07	2.64	2.98	2.58
Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness	2.97	2.36	2.91	2.35	3.00	2.40	3.01	2.45
Spirit of enterprise, ability to take initiative	2.92	2.12	3.12	2.21	3.18	2.25	3.20	2.26

\***Bold + Italics** indicates a difference of 1.00 or more between importance and achievement; *Italics* indicates a difference between 0.90 and 1.00 between importance and achievement.

Since the last European consultation, ten years have passed. Anno 2018 the generic competences thought most important to be developed in all subject areas are:

- Ability for abstract and analytical thinking, and synthesis of ideas (critical thinking and reflection)
- Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations
- Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems (problem solving)
- Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning (learning-to-learn)
- Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)
- Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals (leadership)
- Ability to design and manage projects (project management)
- Ability to work in a team (teamwork)
- Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in first language (oral and written communication)
- Ability to make reasoned decisions (decision making)
- Ability to take the initiative and to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and intellectual curiosity (entrepreneurship)

This list – in its own right – is applied by Tuning to promote and initiate innovation(s) at degree programme level. It is based on a comparison of the outcomes of consultations implemented in different world regions as well as reflections with stakeholders.<sup>507</sup> The list is consistent with (the outcomes of) more recent surveys among in particular employers by other initiatives.<sup>508</sup> Especially,

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<sup>507</sup> Pablo Beneitone and Edurne Bartolomé, Global generic competences with local ownership, in particular the tables on the pages 308-309 and 320-331.

<sup>508</sup> See for example: European Commission, *Employers' perception of graduate employability. Analytical Report*. Flash Eurobarometer 304. Survey conducted by The Gallup Organization, Hungary upon the request of Directorate-General for Education and Culture

Brussels, November 2010, 12 (importance), 25 (achievement). Most important skills identified in the survey: team working skills, sector-specific skills, communication skills, computer skills, ability to adapt to and act in new situations, good reading/ writing skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, planning and organizational skills, decision-making skills;

Hart Research Associates, *It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, April 2013, 8. In this survey employers identify the following eight learning outcomes as the most critical ones: Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills; The ability to analyze and solve complex problems; The ability to effectively communicate orally; The ability to effectively communicate in writing; The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings; The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources; The ability to innovate and be creative; Teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings. Agencia per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya, (AQA), *Employers' Perceptions of the employability and skills of recent graduates in Catalonia. Main findings of the AQU Catalunya Employers Survey 2014*. Barcelona, 2015, 49-53. In this survey demonstrating responsibility at work, the ability to acquire new knowledge, team working, basic computer literacy/ using IT, analysis and problem solving, the ability to come up with new ideas and solutions, communications skills: oral and written expression, skills in writing and presenting reports, etc., ability to work independently, practical skills, languages, decision making skills, theoretical knowledge, numeracy skills, leadership and negotiation skills were surveyed. B. El Mansour and Dean, J.C. Employability Skills as Perceived by Employers and University Faculty in the Fields of Human Resource Development (HRD) for Entry Level Graduate Jobs. *Journal of*

‘creativity’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ are seen as more important at present than in the past as a result of the financial crisis starting in 2008, which forced many graduates to create their own job/business, instead of being employed. The Tuning study on the implementation of student-centred learning shows that in the vast majority of higher education institutions many of these competences are still not trained in a formal learning environment. This can be attributed to the fact that academic staff has never been trained to teach those competences. Therefore, it feels still very uncomfortable about taking up this task. Chapter 8, *A Long Way to Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning outcomes based approach in the EU*, offers more detail.

As stated before, every Tuning subject area group was asked to agree on the most important and relevant generic competences for their subject area (out of the complete list). To facilitate this task, besides the generated data shown above, also the outcomes of the 2001 and 2008 surveys at subject area level and individual higher education level were made available. The latter only for the higher education institutions actively involved in the project and therefore covered in terms of available data. The outcomes showed variations in the importance of the generic competences between academic fields. For Nursing for example ‘Ethical commitment’ (2004)/ ‘Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning’ (2008) proved to score high.<sup>509</sup> The agreed list of selected generic competences was published in the brochures *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes* produced for each of the subject areas. The choices made served as input for defining the cycle level descriptors, also included in these brochures. In all brochures the choices made are explained. A fine example in this respect is the brochure of Business Studies.<sup>510</sup>

## Widening the scope

It took a Tuning I and a Tuning II phase, and a total of 7 general meetings to develop the Tuning methodology for (re)designing degree programmes and to

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*Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 4, 2016, 39-49. Retrieved on 9 January 2018 from: [http://file.scirp.org/Html/5-2830144\\_65145.htm](http://file.scirp.org/Html/5-2830144_65145.htm). Skills surveyed: Knowing how to learn, Communication skills, Creativity, Problem solving, Interpersonal skills, Leadership, Presentation skills, Use of technology, Ability to function as part of a team, Strategic planning, Managing customers, Change management, Communication in foreign languages, Digital competency, Cultural awareness and expression, Initiative and enterprise, Planning and organizing, Self-management.

<sup>509</sup> Tuning II, *Document 2*, Working documents, 14.

<sup>510</sup> Tuning, *Educational Structures in Europe, Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Business*. Bilbao, 2009; See in particular Appendix 2. Statistical Analyses of Tuning I findings concerning competences prepared by Peder Østergaard, 107-118.

prepare first drafts of the subject area brochures.<sup>511</sup> In phase 2 higher education institutions from new EU member states were involved and two additional disciplines were included: European Studies, representing a multi-/interdisciplinary field of study and Nursing, representing a study for a regulated profession. The focus in the second phase was, besides fine-tuning the outcomes of phase 1, on the identification of new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and on the topic of quality enhancement. The activities were framed under the headings ‘validation and consolidation’, ‘new activities’ and ‘new partners, new fields’.<sup>512</sup>

At the request of the European Commission Tuning extended its activities to the Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs) representing additional subject areas. The Commission thought that the Tuning agenda would stimulate and support the TNPs to meet their principal aim ‘to enhance quality and to define and develop a European dimension within a given academic discipline or study area’.<sup>513</sup> It had noticed that some of these programmes needed more focus. In May 2003 the Tuning coordinators informed the TNPs at a network meeting in Brussels about the options on offer. It distinguished three possibilities of involvement in an increasing order of involvement, starting from exchanging information about the Tuning approach, through cooperation as a synergy group to finally cooperation as a core area. In all cases the TNPs could ask for a Tuning counsellor to help understanding the Tuning approach and, in the case of actual implementation, to offer advice and support. Many TNPs made use of this opportunity, because Tuning was included in the call as one of the lines for obtaining (extra) EU support and therefore might enhance the chances to be selected for funding as a TNP. According to the list of outputs foreseen for the Tuning phase 3 (2005-2006) it expected to involve some 40 TNPs of which around 20 would reach the status of ‘core area’. This proved to be a bit too ambitious. Indeed, some 20 TNPs installed a working group, but they were not all able to cover the full set of Tuning lines. Nevertheless, through the TNPs serious ‘volume’ was created of developing the Tuning approach. At a later stage (2009-2012), as part of two Tuning Sectoral

<sup>511</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities’ contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005, 44-155.

<sup>512</sup> Application Form for “General activities of observation and analysis” Action 6.1 SOCRATES Programme (closing date for submission 3 May 2002): Project proposal Tuning Educational Structures in Europe II, main aims and objectives. Tuning Archive.

<sup>513</sup> Website EACEA, Erasmus Thematic Networks (Socrates). Retrieved from: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/overview/ThemNetwks\\_overview.htm](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/overview/ThemNetwks_overview.htm); see also: Anne Klemperer and Marijk van der Wende, 7. Curriculum Development Activities and Thematic Network Projects. In: Ulrich Teichler Jean Gordon Friedhelm Maiworm, eds. *SOCRATES 2000 Evaluation Study*. Study for the European Commission. November 2000, 162-171.

Framework projects, 5 additional Tuning Reference points subject area brochures were prepared and published.<sup>514</sup>

Besides extending the work to more subject areas, the third phase was also used to get a better grip on the third cycle and the programmes offered in that most advanced level of studies. Each subject area made an inventory of the state of affairs in their discipline in the countries covered by their members. The activity was intended as subsidiary to the work the European University Association (EUA) was establishing on the master degrees; the EUA focussing more on the system level, Tuning on structures and implementation at subject area level. At a Bologna Seminar (2005) “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society” the participants agreed on 10 principles to which doctoral programmes should apply. These are now known as the ‘Salzburg Principles’, named after the place where the event took place<sup>515</sup> Tuning noticed not only fundamental differences in the structure and implementation of doctoral studies between countries, but also between subject areas and within subject areas between countries. Contrary to the EUA, Tuning advocated to base doctoral studies on ECTS-credits to structure these programmes better and to facilitate the (progress of) studies of its doctoral candidates/ young researchers.<sup>516</sup> It offered a ‘signposts’ model based on credit allocation. Furthermore, it developed a ten step approach to design and to deliver doctoral programmes.<sup>517</sup> This approach was completely consistent with the Tuning model/methodology for first and second cycle programmes. The analyses regarding the third cycle were included in the brochures *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes*. Tuning also published two more sophisticated documents developed by the subject areas Physics and Music on its website.<sup>518</sup>

<sup>514</sup> *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Psychology, Literary Studies, Linguistics, Theology and Religious Studies and Art History*. See website International Tuning Academy for the Reference Point brochure on Psychology: [http://tuningacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/RefPsychology\\_EU\\_EN.pdf](http://tuningacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/RefPsychology_EU_EN.pdf); The other brochures can be retrieved from the Tuning Europe website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/sqf-humanities-and-arts/outcomes.html>

<sup>515</sup> Bologna Seminar on “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society” (Salzburg, 3-5 February 2005) Conclusions and Recommendations. Retrieved 31 July 2016: [http://www.eua.be/Libraries/cde-website/Salzburg\\_Conclusions.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.eua.be/Libraries/cde-website/Salzburg_Conclusions.pdf?sfvrsn=0). See for its follow-up: EUA, *Salzburg II Recommendations. European universities’ achievements since 2005 in implementing the Salzburg Principles*. Brussels, 2010. EUA, *Doctoral Education – Taking Salzburg forward. Implementation and new challenges*. Brussels, 2016.

<sup>516</sup> Julia González, Katherine Isaacs and Robert Wagenaar, *Applying the Tuning approach to Third Cycle Studies*. Bilbao, Pisa and Groningen, 2008. Retrieved 1 August 2016: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/Third\\_cycle/APPLYING\\_THE\\_TUNING\\_APPROACH\\_TO\\_THIRD\\_CYCLE\\_STUDIES.pdf](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/Third_cycle/APPLYING_THE_TUNING_APPROACH_TO_THIRD_CYCLE_STUDIES.pdf)

<sup>517</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, *Introduction to Third Cycle (Doctoral) studies as part of the Tuning ‘Process’*. Bilbao-Groningen, 2008. Retrieved 1 August 2016: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/Third\\_cycle/INTRODUCTION\\_TO\\_THIRD\\_CYCLE.pdf](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/Third_cycle/INTRODUCTION_TO_THIRD_CYCLE.pdf)

<sup>518</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, “Third cycle studies in Physics” (2007), retrieved 1 August 2016 from: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/tuning-3rd-cycle/physics.html>

With regard to the Salzburg Bologna Seminar conclusions, Tuning stipulated that a list of principles was clearly insufficient to make doctoral programmes 'fit for purpose'. Purpose to be defined as preparing for a societal role, in terms of employability and citizenship. It noted that 'every higher education institution is trying to find its own way – in its given cultural and educational environment – to find answers to the challenges created by the double role of doctoral studies. On the one hand they contribute considerably to the research taking place in an institution, on the other hand they are supposed to prepare the brightest young people for their role in society. These objectives are not easily made compatible. Many researchers still lay emphasis on the first objective and are less interested in the second one. This attitude is understandable, given the tradition of doctoral studies, but it is no longer appropriate today in the context of a growing number of doctoral candidates and holders of doctoral degrees. In the past most *doctors* found employment in higher education institutions or in organizations of which doing fundamental and/or applied research was their core business. Given the number of doctoral candidates universities are expected to educate at present, this will be less and less the case in the future. This implies that career opportunities for these highly educated young people are and should be a concern of governments in general and of universities in particular'<sup>519</sup>

## Validation and Dissemination

The involvement of the TNPs was seen as a first step in disseminating the Tuning approach at the subject area level. Not only with regard to the first two cycles, but also for the third cycle. At the same time the project did its utmost best to keep in close contact with other policy making levels as a strategy to make its activities known. This is shown in the list of speakers at the Tuning (semi-) public Launch and Closing conferences of the first three phases. Over the years, two European Commissioners for Education and Culture, Viviane A. Reding and Ján Figel, addressed the Tuning audience, as did David Coyne and his successor David White as directors for education, Barbara Nolan (Head of Unit Higher Education-Erasmus) and the policy officers Peter van der Hijden, Christian Tauch and Julie Fionda. But the speakers also involved members of the Bologna Follow-up Group, representing national authorities: Hermann Mueller-Solger, Ger-

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and Ester Tomasi (ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia') and Joost Vanmaele (Orpheus Instituut Gent), *Doctoral studies in the field of Music – Current status and latest developments*, retrieved 1 August 2016 from: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/tuning-3rd-cycle/music.html>

<sup>519</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, *Introduction to Third Cycle (Doctoral) studies as part of the Tuning 'Process'*. Bilbao-Groningen, 2008. Retrieved 1 August 2016: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/Third\\_cycle/INTRODUCTION\\_TO\\_THIRD\\_CYCLE.pdf](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/Third_cycle/INTRODUCTION_TO_THIRD_CYCLE.pdf)



man Ministry of Education and the chair of the Preparatory Group for the Ministerial Conference in Berlin (2003), Ian McKenna, Irish Ministry of Education and chair of the BFUG in the first half of 2004, Germain Dondelinger, Luxembourg Ministry of Education and chair of the BFUG in the first half of 2005, Per Nyborg, Norwegian Ministry of Education and head of the Secretariat of the Ministerial Conference in Bergen and Mogens Berg, Swedish Ministry of Education and chair of the Bologna Working group on the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

Also, representatives of the EUA, president Eric Froment and secretary-general Lesley Wilson offered key notes at a number of the Tuning conferences. Representatives of EURASHE, ESIB/ESU, ENQA, the Joint Quality Initiative, ENIC-NARIC and EUROCADRES (employers) participated in panels.<sup>520</sup> These close contacts did not continue at the same intensity after 2006. This was due to the fact that Tuning, in its fourth phase, concentrated in particular on the validation and dissemination aspects of its work. It has to be mentioned, however, that the two main dissemination conferences were announced on the EHEA website of the Bologna Follow-up Group and organised with the full support of the Flemish Ministry of Education which also offered the conference rooms required.<sup>521</sup> Both conferences were also included by the EUA on its website.<sup>522</sup>

The contacts at national level, national ministries and Rectors' Conferences, including Conferences of Deans were left to the individual members of the project. This was different for the professional organisations. In those cases, relationships were organised and kept by the coordinators of the subject area groups. Reference can be found in the subject area brochures *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery in [ name of subject area ]*. Examples in this respect are the European Community Studies Association (ECSA) for European Studies and the European Mathematical Society. Another good example is Nursing, that worked in close cooperation with stakeholder organisations to define its Tuning outcomes, such as the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN), the European Council of Nursing Regulators (FEPI) and the European Federation of Nurse Educators. What is also worth mentioning is the interest shown in the USA. Its National Council of State Boards of Nursing prepared a report (2010) in which

<sup>520</sup> This overview is based on the programmes of launch and closing session included in the following Tuning documents: Tuning II, *Document 1 and 3*, Tuning III, *Document 1 and 2* and *Tuning Validation Conference 1* (Natural Sciences) and *Tuning Dissemination Conference II*.

<sup>521</sup> Bologna Process – European Higher Education Area event calendar, retrieved 31 July 2016: <http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?eventId=238>

<sup>522</sup> European University Association, Tuning Conference: “Competence-based learning: the approach for the future?”, 12-13 June 2008, Brussels, Belgium. Last retrieved on 9 January 2018 from: [http://www.eua.be/activities-services/news/newsitem/08-05-08/Tuning\\_Conference\\_“Competence-based\\_learning\\_the\\_approach\\_for\\_the\\_future”\\_12-13\\_June\\_2008\\_Brussels\\_Belgium.aspx](http://www.eua.be/activities-services/news/newsitem/08-05-08/Tuning_Conference_“Competence-based_learning_the_approach_for_the_future”_12-13_June_2008_Brussels_Belgium.aspx)

the 47 nursing education Tuning competences were evaluated.<sup>523</sup> Already in 2006 the EFN with a European mandate and the International Council of Nursing (ICN) with a global mandate drew up together a Joint Position Statement on ‘The Bologna Agreement and the Tuning Project: Next steps for nursing’.<sup>524</sup> In the UK the Tuning competences were incorporated in the revised Standards for pre-registration nursing education (2010).<sup>525</sup>

The very first conference intended for a wider audience in which provisional results were presented, was the one that took place in the large theatre of the Charlemagne Building of the European Commission mid-June 2006. It was a combined closing conference of phase 3 of the Tuning Europe project and phase 1 of the Tuning Latin America project which was officially launched in October 2004. The conference obtained the title: ‘Curricular Reform Taking Shape. Learning Outcomes and Competences in Higher Education’ and was attended by 429 participants.<sup>526</sup>

As a follow-up, Tuning IV (2007-2009) was devoted to validation of the documents developed during the first three phases as well as to the further dissemination of results. It was thought important to have both the Tuning approach for modernising degree programmes and the reference points documents validated. For this purpose, validation panels were set-up, containing renowned experts, for each subject area. The members were proposed by the groups but it was assured they had no relationship with Tuning projects to guarantee their open-mindedness. Each panel contained 8 to 11 members, including a student in half of them. The format was that of a reflection between panel members and members of the subject area group based on a set of fixed questions, covering all 5 Tuning lines as included in the document prepared by each group.

Tuning organised three one-day validation conferences in 2007, covering four academic domains: Natural Sciences, Humanistic Sciences, Social Sciences and Health Care.<sup>527</sup> Besides the nine Tuning core groups, the documents of the

<sup>523</sup> National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Report of Findings from the 2009 TUNING Analysis: A Comparison of U.S. and International Nursing Educational Competencies. Chicago, 2010.

<sup>524</sup> The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) and The International Council of Nurses (ICN), *Joint Position Statement. From the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) and The International Council of Nurses (ICN). The Bologna Agreement and the Tuning Project: Next steps for nursing*. Brussels and Geneva, 24 March 2006. Tuning Archive.

<sup>525</sup> Nursing and Midwifery Council, *Standards for pre-registration nursing education*. London (NMC), 2010.

<sup>526</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Meeting document Curricular Reform Taking Shape. Learning Outcomes and Competences in Higher Education. Brussels, 16 June 2006.

<sup>527</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Validation Conference of the Natural Sciences in the Tuning project. Brussels 23 March 2007. Meeting document 4; Tuning Educational Structure in Europe, Validation Conference of Health Care in the Tuning project. Brussels 22 June 2007. Meeting document 4; Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Validation Conference of

following areas were validated: Humanitarian Action, Performing Arts (Dance and Theatre), Arts and Design, Music, Architecture, Medicine, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy. The Reference Points booklets of these fields were published in the period 2008-2011.<sup>528</sup> Gender Studies followed the same procedure in February 2010.<sup>529</sup> Other Reference Points brochures were published in later years, without going through a validation process, being Linguistics, (Comparative) Literature, Art History and Theology and Religious Studies, but also Psychology that got the full backing of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations<sup>530</sup>. Many TNPs produced their own Tuning material. A good example in this respect is the publication *The alignment of generic, specific and Language skills within the Electrical and Information Engineering discipline. Application of the TUNING approach*. A detailed document of 188 pages.<sup>531</sup> Although the planned number of around 20 TNP core areas – besides the 9 officially included in the Tuning projects – did not materialise as part of the four phases of the Tuning project 2001-2009, it came close. The Tuning Europe website offers project outcomes for some 38 different subjects areas.<sup>532</sup>

Starting with a Public Hearing, taking place in Brussels on 20 February 2002, which was entitled 'Universities and Higher Education in the Countries of the European Union and Third Countries. Recognition of degrees, mobility and problems of convergence: European experiences in favour of a common space for higher education'<sup>533</sup>, many presentations and key notes were delivered over time by the project initiators, the subject area coordinators and individual members for both an international and national audiences. Also Tuning was disseminated by publications in newsletters, journals and other academic publications. The ones published during the Tuning phases 1 and 2 were listed in the *Final*

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Humanistic and Social Sciences in the Tuning project. Brussels 6 November 2007. Tuning meeting document 4.

<sup>528</sup> Tuning Europe website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/publications/subject-area-brochures.html>. The Depósito legal number indicates the year of publication.

<sup>529</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Gender Studies*. Bilbao, 2010, 9-11, 15-16 and annex 2, Report of the Validation Panel, 141-147.

<sup>530</sup> EFPA website: [http://www.efpa.eu/professional-development/tuning-europsy-\\_tuning-educational-structures-in-europe](http://www.efpa.eu/professional-development/tuning-europsy-_tuning-educational-structures-in-europe)

<sup>531</sup> A. Ward, *Final Report for Task on: The alignment of generic, specific and language skills within the Electrical and Information Engineering discipline, Application of the TUNING approach* (EIE Surveyor Project), 2008.

<sup>532</sup> Website Tuning Educational Structures in Europe: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/subject-areas.html>

<sup>533</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Meeting document Public Hearing Universities and Higher Education in the Countries of the European Union and Third Countries. Recognition of degrees, mobility and problems of convergence: European experiences in favour of a common space for higher education*. Brussels, Wednesday 20 February 2002.

*Report. Pilot phase 2*, distributed at the end of 2005.<sup>534</sup> The material for that book was used as a basis for a booklet of 160 pages: *Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process. An introduction*. The English edition was published in 2007 and reprinted in 2008 in a total of more than 15.000 copies and widely distributed. The booklet has also been translated and published in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Polish, Japanese, Albanian, Croatian, Georgian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Serbian and Ukrainian. All the material produced was also made available on the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe website and at a later stage the International Tuning Academy website. It was frequently consulted since its launch. In January 2009 when the 4 Tuning project phases had come to an end, it had had nearly 2.4 million visitors.<sup>535</sup> Mid-2015 the website had more than 4.5 million hits, when for technical and security reasons the website could not be updated anymore.

As said, Tuning organized two large scale dissemination conferences in the first half of 2008. The first was entitled 'Student Workload and Learning Outcomes; key components for (re)designing degree programmes'. It covered 12 interactive workshops to debate the following topics: 'ECTS credits for Lifelong Learning', 'Calculating and measuring student workload', 'ECTS: a key element in quality programmes', 'The relation between Learning Outcomes and student workload', 'ECTS credits and Learning Outcomes in Third Cycle programmes', 'Transnational programmes based on Learning Outcomes and ECTS credits', 'The Learning Outcomes-Competence Approach and measuring the quality of academic performance', 'Allocating credits to programmes: modularized and non-modularized programmes', 'Using the Tuning model for preparing a degree programme', 'Using the Tuning model for preparing a course unit', 'ECTS and levels' and finally 'ECTS and internships/ placements'. For each workshop a short report was made, which contained the key questions raised, a summary of the discussions and the conclusion drawn.<sup>536</sup>

The second conference, organized a few months later and also taking place at the premises of the Flemish Government, was entitled 'Competence-based learning: the approach for the future?'. The format differed from the first dissemination conference. The workshops were organized by subject area, covering the

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<sup>534</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005, 374-378.

<sup>535</sup> Stated in letter of project co-ordinator to University Board, dated 20 January 2009. Tuning Archive. In the *Narrative Report of Tuning Educational Structures in Europe – Phase IV – Curricular Reform Taking Place: Outcomes and Competences in Higher Education*, prepared in April 2009, it is mentioned that the website had almost 2.6 million hits. Tuning Archive

<sup>536</sup> Meeting Document: Tuning Dissemination Conference I, *Student Workload and Learning Outcomes: Key components for (re)designing degree programmes*, Brussels, 21-22 April 2008 (155 participants).

nine Tuning core fields, as well as Civil Engineering, Music and Occupational Therapy, plus one workshop not related to a specific subject area. All workshops were based on a fixed format of four consecutive sessions, covering the first Tuning lines. From the list of participants it can be learned that the workshops were attended by both Tuning and non-Tuning core group members.<sup>537</sup>

In 2009 the work of Tuning obtained recognition in the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve 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. We ask the higher education institutions to pay particular attention to improving the teaching quality of their study programmes at all levels’.<sup>538</sup>

In the same Communiqué the Ministers acknowledge that labour markets increasingly rely ‘on higher skill levels and transversal competences’ and therefore they stipulate that ‘higher education should equip students with the advanced knowledge, skills and competences they need throughout their professional lives’.

At that time, it was too early to judge whether the Tuning approach to reform programmes in the direction it advocated, had the effect it hoped for. Two years later, in 2011, a study was initiated which should tell us more whether the intended modernisation of learning was actually taking place. The first years were used to develop robust evaluation instruments and the subsequent years to implement these in practice. The results were presented at the beginning of 2016 to the European Commission and published in the paper *A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning outcomes based approach in the EU*, which is included in this book as chapter 8.

Tuning continued its activities in Europe with two Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks projects, one for the Social Sciences (2008-2010)<sup>539</sup> and another one for the Arts and the Humanities (HUMART) (2010-2012).<sup>540</sup> A project to cover

<sup>537</sup> Meeting Document: Tuning Dissemination Conference II, *Competence-based learning: the approach for the future?* Brussels, 12-13 June 2008. Number of participants: 229.

<sup>538</sup> Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009 – ‘The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade’. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009: Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101040/ministerial-conference-leuven-louvain-neuve-2009.html>, 3-4.

<sup>539</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Tuning Sectoral Framework for Social Sciences. Final Report 2008-2010. Bilbao, 2010. Published as a brochure, and approachable on the Tuning website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/tuning-sqf-social-sciences/documents-a-publication.html>. This web address also gives access to working documents and PPT presentations.

<sup>540</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning Sectoral Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010-2011*. Bilbao, 2012. Approached at: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF\\_HUMART\\_Final\\_Report\\_2010-2011.pdf](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF_HUMART_Final_Report_2010-2011.pdf). Further documents at: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/sqf-humanities-and-arts/outcomes.html>

the Natural Sciences was not selected by the European Commission for funding. The reason for submitting these applications were impact related. It was noted in practice that higher education institutions and their academics had difficulties to handle and implement two European meta-frameworks which were different in philosophy and structure, the QF for the EHEA and the EQF for Lifelong Learning. It was also observed as a hindrance that the Tuning subject area based frameworks and its descriptors were – strictly spoken – not one to one related to one of these two frameworks. It was thought that a solution to this discrepancy should be found in two directions: the re-structuring of the sets of subject area level descriptors on the basis of the EQF and the development of descriptors at sectoral level - a sector or domain to be understood as a combination of related fields of study based on more or less comparable learning profiles. Tuning distinguished six academic sectors: health care, natural sciences, social sciences, creative and performing disciplines, humanities and engineering.

These sectoral frameworks should act at macro level as a bridge between the meta level of European wide frameworks and the micro level, the disciplinary level. Although there was some initial doubt whether it would be feasible and helpful to develop frameworks at macro level, the outcome of the exercise was very satisfying. The sectoral frameworks proved a great help for restructuring and rephrasing the Tuning descriptors in EQF terms, that is applying the categories ‘knowledge, skills and competences’. The latter category to be understood as ‘wider’ competences, because in the Tuning philosophy and terminology also knowledge and skills are perceived as competences. The alignment of the different types of frameworks and their relationship and its consequences is explained in more detail in chapter 9, *Columbus Egg? Qualifications Frameworks, Sectoral Profiles and Degree Programme Profiles in Higher Education*.

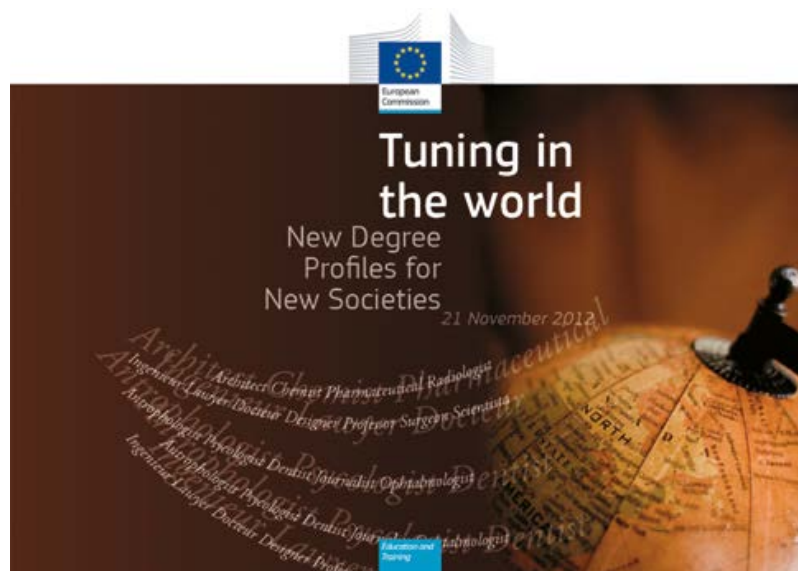
## Impact or lack of it

Having the overall structure and its different elements in place, it was more or less expected that the actual use of the developed material was a matter of time – probably a decade. It was also thought that quality assurance and accreditation which had already been introduced in a number of countries, and was at the point of introduction in others as an integral part of the Bologna Process, would act as catalyzers in this respect. At the same time, it was well understood that a structure should be created to assist the actual implementation process.

Therefore, at the end of phase 4 so-called national Tuning Information Points were installed being manned by an experienced ‘Tuner’ and empowered by Tuning material resulting from its projects. It was also decided to create an International Tuning Academy based at the universities that initiated the Tuning Projects, Deu-

to, Bilbao and Groningen. It took some years to do so. The Bilbao branch was opened on 27 September 2010 by the just appointed deputy director general for Education and Culture Xavier Pratt as part of an international conference. The Groningen branch was installed half a year later, 15 May 2011, by the international conference titled ‘Tuning’s contribution to modernisation of Higher Education in Europe and the world’ in which the former European Commission director for Education David Coyne was a key note speaker’. On top, plans were developed to set up a world-wide Tuning Association for all that had participated in Tuning projects. It has not materialized yet. What was established, was a bi-annual peer reviewed printed and electronic scholarly *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Its first issue, published in November 2013, had the theme ‘New profiles for new societies’. One year earlier, the International Tuning Academy organized in close coordination with Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission the conference ‘Tuning in the world’, carrying the same subtitle as the first issue of its journal. The conference was attended by more than 700 participants representing all parts of the world. The opening address was delivered by Jan Trusczyński, the director general DG Education and Culture and the closing address by Androulla Vassiliou, the commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth. It confirmed the strong relationship and moral and financial support by the European Commission for the Tuning initiative.

*Image 6: Conference Tuning in the world*



Despite these successes the Tuning leadership was very much concerned about the disappointing level of implementation of the student-centred/competences/ learning outcomes driven approach in Europe. This is reflected in a key

note titled “Tuning Revisited”. Modernisation of Curricula in Europe and Beyond: Are we failing/succeeding? Or are we not?, delivered by this author at the international seminar for Bologna experts in June 2011. Its main conclusion: we still have a very long way to go to win the hearts and minds of academics to implement the new concepts and approaches.

These concerns were shared by others. In 2010 Luigi Berlinguer, one of the four ministers who signed the Sorbonne Declaration and at the time Member of the European Parliament, rang the alarm clock at the political level to express the disappointing results of the Bologna Process. He setup a seminar at the premises of the European Parliament on 5 May 2010 entitled: ‘Re-launching the Bologna Process. The future of the Higher Education Area in Europe’.<sup>541</sup> The outcomes of the seminar were input for the preparation of a report and a resolution for the European Parliament intended to give the Bologna Process a boost. The resolution was passed on 13 March 2012 with 572 votes in favour, 89 against (in particular UK parliamentarians arguing that education was the prime responsibility of national governments) and 8 abstentions. In terms of governance the resolution calls for ‘an effective, bottom-up approach, fully involving all key actors, such as universities, trade unions, professional organisations, research institutions, the business sector and, first and foremost, teachers, students, student organisations and university staff’. It also asks for ‘commitment on the part of universities to new teaching and new professional and lifelong training strategies (...) that are focused on the pillars of a learning-centred, student-centred and research-centred university system able to provide critical thinking, creative skills, continuous professional development as well as theoretical and practical knowledge which students will need in their working lives’. These aims are linked to the call in the resolution ‘for strong financial support for agreements on common core curricula, which guarantee well defined learning outcomes, inter alia by exploring the methodology approach developed by Tuning and through the experience of the ‘Tuning Academy’”.<sup>542</sup>

Although there was deep concern about lack of implementation of the approach, the Tuning philosophy and methodology proved to be picked up by scholars widely. At the end of 2016 it had been referenced more than 2000 times; one and a half year later 500 times more. It was also applied as a source of inspiration for other projects. Just to offer one example, the *NICE Handbook for the*

<sup>541</sup> Speakers at the seminar, for which also a poster and leaflets were produced were, besides Luigi Berlinguer on behalf of the Group of the Progressive Alliances of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament: P. Kammerevert (S&D Group), Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Ms. A. Vassiliou, Lesley Wilson (EUA), Robert Wagenaar (Tuning Project), Erkan Ertan (student; president Juso Hochschulgruppen) and Giunio Luzzatto (Bologna Expert Group IT).

<sup>542</sup> European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2012 on the contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process (2011/2180(INI): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2012-0072&language=EN>



*Academic Training of Career Guidance and Counselling Professionals*, used it to construct a framework and a methodology to apply.<sup>543</sup> It is also worth mentioning that in the health care sector the work done by the subject area groups of Medicine and Nursing had serious impact on the revision of the European regulations for their fields, moving from time based learning to the learning outcomes based approach.<sup>544</sup> Furthermore, some individual countries embraced the approach explicitly for the modernisation of their higher education programmes, in particular Georgia and Lithuania. The Georgian project was initiated by the deputy minister of education, Bela Tsipura, by using the EU Tempus framework. The Tuning project set up in Lithuania was part of a larger reform initiative, including the introduction of a quality assurance system and financed from European social funds.<sup>545</sup> Also, Russia would apply the Tuning outcomes to revise its 'standards' for higher education. Tuning in the meantime spread worldwide, involving in 2018 some 130 countries with projects implemented or running – besides Europe – in the Mediterranean, Central-Asia, Russia, Africa, Latin-America, China, Japan, India, South-East-Asia, USA and feasibility studies in Australia and Canada. Many of these projects run their own websites. Just to give an indication of the interest showed. In December 2018 the Tuning Europe website had 4.75 million hits, the Tuning America Latina website more than 5.7 million visits, the Tuning Russia website 1.5 million visitors and the International Tuning Academy 0.5 million visits.

Finally, it is worth mentioning, that Tuning was also identified and perceived as being useful by professional organisations. Already Nursing was mentioned in this respect. Another intriguing example is accountancy, because it was not covered by the Tuning projects. The Dutch professional organization of accountants, the Netherlands, the Koninklijke Nederlandse Organisatie van Accountants (NBA), 'discovered the Tuning methodology and decided to use it to re-formulate its learning outcomes for the higher education accountancy degree programmes in the Netherlands (2014-2015). In doing so it applied a top-down/ bottom-up approach involving a large number of experts from the field, both professionals

<sup>543</sup> Christiane Schiersmann, Bernd-Joachim Ertelt, Johannes Katsarov, Rachel Mulvey, Hazel Reid & Peter Weber, eds., Chapter 3, NICE Tuning Framework in: *NICE Handbook for the Academic Training of Career Guidance and Counselling Professionals*. Heidelberg, 2012, pp. 27-40. The Handbook has also been published in French, German and Spanish.

<sup>544</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Nursing*. Bilbao, 2011, 65-66.

<sup>545</sup> A further example is the project Tuning Teacher Education Curricula in the Western Balkan financed by the Balkan Trust for Democracy and Central European Initiative. See for its final publication: Nataša Pantic, ed., *Tuning Teacher Education Curricula in the Western Balkans*. Belgrade (Centre for Education Policy) November 2008. See also project preceding: J. Kleut, *Regional tuning – towards the European Higher Education Area*. Belgrade (Centre for Education Policy) 2006.

and teaching staff. The reception of the revised set of learning outcomes proved to be very positive.

Nevertheless, as stated before, at around 2010 Tuning had its doubts about the lack of speed regarding the introduction of the student-centred approach and application of the instruments developed to reform higher education programmes. It was thought necessary to gather more and better information and thus provide evidence of the relative impact on the learning environment as a result of the Tuning process and comparable initiatives and activities. In terms of impact this should be evidenced by changes in behaviour brought about by adopting the Tuning process or comparable Learning Outcomes based processes, changes in learning and teaching strategies and methodologies and the provision of learning opportunities and assessment of student learning. This set against the overall objective of the Tuning approach to prepare graduates better for their role in society, both in terms of employability and active citizenship. As was already stated in the concluding remarks of the chapter 2 the 'impact study' was set up in close cooperation with the Lumina Foundation for Education, which had taken the initiative to introduce the Tuning approach in the USA in 2009. The 'mirror' project covered both the EU and the USA and was co-financed by the European Commission and Lumina.

It is not a coincidence that the report to the European Commission<sup>546</sup> of the project and a scholarly article restrained from it for the *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*<sup>547</sup> included in their title 'A long way to go ...', the same phrase used in the conclusion of the presentation at the international seminar for Bologna and higher education reform experts in 2011. The report did not surprise the leadership of DG Education and Culture (which, despite its disappointing conclusions, published it on its website for a limited amount of time.<sup>548</sup> It confirmed the conclusions of the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education which made its conclusions public 3 years earlier.<sup>549</sup> Nevertheless, there was disappointment and frustration. In 2014 Adam Tyson, at the time head of the unit responsible for the modernisation agenda, and acting director for education

<sup>546</sup> International Tuning Academy, *A long way to go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU and the USA*. Groningen, 2016.

<sup>547</sup> Birtwistle, T., C. Brown and R. Wagenaar (2016), 'A long way to go ... A study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU', *Tuning Journal for Higher Education. Echoes from micro and macro Higher Education Reform processes*. Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 429-463.

<sup>548</sup> EAC website: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/study/2016eu-us-learning-outcomes\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2016eu-us-learning-outcomes_en.pdf). This link is no longer active; Report was also published by UNESCO: <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/library/a-long-way-to-go-a-study-on-the-implementation-of-the-learning-outcomes-based-approach-in>

<sup>549</sup> High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions*. June 2013. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013.

of DG Education and Culture had already expressed his doubts about the effectiveness of Tuning in Europe due to its limited notoriety at higher education institutional level and its limited success to get its methodology accepted and implemented. This was perceived as a fair opinion by the Tuning initiators and also partly shared. Although by now Tuning as a 'brand' was well known by policy and quality assurance officers and experts at international and national level, the impact study showed that in higher education institutions mainly the higher management was informed about it, whereas most academics and students were not. Only those academics and students who had participated in international curriculum reform related projects, such as Tuning and Thematic Network Programmes, picked up the work established by many of hundreds of their colleagues. This does not come as a surprise with 3300 higher education institutions in the EU and more than 4000 in Europe and the lack of initiative of national authorities to line up with their institutions to get the job done.<sup>550</sup>

## In conclusion

Chapter 2 finished with critical remarks about the lack of alignment of the international and national level to the implementation level, that is the higher education institutions, including its grass-root level, the academics and students. It had as an outcome that the results at system level were disappointing and the intended conversion of policies did not reach much further than cross-national policy diffusion with some flavour of policy transfer. Although the importance of higher education institutions for implementing policies were stressed in particular since the Leuven-Louvain Follow-up conference role, in practice no concrete actions were undertaken. Only the European Commission invested in the modernisation of curricula through its SOCRATES programme and its successor the Lifelong Learning programme. The only strategy the Bologna Follow-up group came up with was by revising the ECTS Users' Guide into an instrument for curriculum development.

Having (deep) knowledge about the national higher education systems in Europe and confronted with the unsatisfying level of recognition of mobility periods, it was no surprise that out of the group of ECTS counsellors an initiative came forward thought necessary to make political ambitions a reality. The main arguments: reforms will never take place without involvement of those who have to implement policies, that is the grass-root level. Based on their more than 10 years of experience in promoting the ECTS, they understood that modernisation

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<sup>550</sup> Dragoescu, R.M., 'An overview of higher education at the European level', in: *Computational Methods in Social Sciences*. Vol. I, No. 2, 2013, pp. 21-29.

of higher education not only required system harmonization, it would also need conversion of structures and content of studies. In other words, not only *policy making* would be required at the highest decision making levels, but also applying a tailored *approach* for the upgrading of curricula, making these more relevant for society. These arguments motivated them to establish the project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. It is interesting to note how much the issue of terminology played a role in defining the project proposal for the EC, the institution which in 2000 was still quite unsure about its position in the Bologna Process. In that setting the European Commission E showed courage and leadership to go along with the Tuning initiative and to invest half a million euros for what would become its first phase.

Having also the effects of the high youth unemployment in mind, the initiative of the ECTS international counsellor group in 2000 was timely and appropriate. As has been shown in this chapter the initiators had to deal with huge challenges, both in conceptual and methodological terms. They realized very well they were operating in a multi-level governance structure (the theoretical framework was not introduced at the time) in which it would be required to reach out to the different levels of decision making, identifying five of which three were positioned within the higher education institutions.

Besides issues regarding governance, it also would have to deal with educational concepts, which were still rather new at the time: student-centred learning, competence-based learning and learning outcomes, generic and subject specific competences, credit accumulation, degree profiles, and, after the initial stage, cycle (level) descriptors, qualifications frameworks.

Also in methodological terms the Tuning project had to be developed from scratch. There was no real experience in a project of this kind, in terms of complexity and scale. What helped was the expertise obtained in the related ECTS Pilot Scheme (1989-1995) as part of the ERASMUS action programme although it covered only one aspect, 'credits' and the work initiated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the United Kingdom. From 2000 the Quality Assurance Agency published its first so-called subject benchmark statements. Nevertheless, the Tuning methodology to be applied was brand new. This was true for the format and organisational structure applied – plenaries and subject area working groups, meeting documents, the model of subject area coordinators and overall management, the different phases and lines of analysis to apply and the involvement of stakeholders, graduates, employers, professional organisations and, at a later stage, also students. The basic idea was to come up with two main types of outcomes: a methodology for designing, implementing, delivering and enhancing degree programmes, and so-called reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in a range of subject areas. The first objective was met in 2005, the second in the years 2008-2011. All documents were vali-

dated by peers on the basis of a structured process before publication. The total number of brochures, including the products of Thematic Networks Programmes, would grow to nearly 20.

In terms of raising awareness the project intended and indeed delivered in terms of promoting transparency by offering a model for academic and professional profiles and study programmes based on the competences/learning outcomes approach; the Europe-wide introduction of the student-centred paradigm from 2003; promoting diversity of learning required in a lifelong learning context; preparing for employment and citizenship; the enhancement of the European dimension of higher education and providing a language for communication with stakeholders. The project also prepared tools to assist in the use of the Tuning methodology: a ten-step approach for the design and the delivery of degree programmes, a list of generic competences, a Tuning list of Key Questions for Programme Design and Programme Delivery, Maintenance and Evaluation in the framework of the Bologna Reform and a Tuning checklist for Curriculum Evaluation.

Did this mean Tuning can be seen as a successful endeavour? In terms of the methodology and the tools it developed without any doubt, Tuning was not only disseminated in Europe but at present in a total of nearly 130 countries around the world. How about in terms of aligning with other levels of decision making? Initially, until around 2008/9 the answer is positive, since the termination of the 4 phases of Tuning (2001-2009) far less. As part of the fourth phase it organised two successful dissemination conferences. The Tuning website proved to be an effective means of communication as well, reaching nearly 2.4 million hits in January 2009. It obtained recognition as a project by all stakeholders involved, endorsement for its products and wide visibility, but did this also imply impact?

## Annex: Template for a summary of Tuning subject area findings (*version 2018*)

### *TUNING Guidelines and Reference points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in [Name of Subject Area]*

#### *1. Introduction to the subject area*

Covers a general description of the subject area and its key characteristics: is it understood in the same way in all European countries or are there relevant differences; are there any other particular aspects that should be mentioned in an overview. In the case the subject area is regulated (in part of the countries), this should be stipulated here.

#### *2. Map of typical degrees offered in the subject area*

Offers an overview of the typical degrees offered in the subject area. If relevant, attention should be given to different naming of these degrees covering the same topics. Conversely, indicate differences headed under the same naming applied. The three cycles should be distinguished here. If relevant offer an indication of the role of the subject area in the degree programmes of other subject areas if substantial.

#### *3. Map of typical occupations of graduates and typical tasks applied in the work field*

Gives a general description of the employability field for which the study programme prepares. It lists also typical occupations in which students find employment, indicates typical tasks which graduates should be able to perform successfully and describes typical roles graduates are expected to play. It might be advisable to group these tasks under profiling headings. If adequate and relevant, make a distinction between the three cycles.

#### *4. Level cycle descriptors: Competences and Learning outcomes*

##### *a) Overview of typical generic and subject specific competences*

Included here is the list of subject specific competences, covering core knowledge and skills defining the academic field, and generic competences most relevant from the subject area perspective. Both list are the outcomes of stakeholders' surveys and reflection in the working group responsible for the document.

- b) Meta-profile of the subject area: clustering of competences on the basis of agreed dimensions

Here the meta-profile is presented, which is the outcome of the debate of the working group. It offers an overview of the clustered subject and generic competences per identified dimension which are typical capstone/focal points for the academic field. The meta-profile can be presented in different forms, but should be supported by a clear explanation of the choices made.

- c) Level descriptors for each of the three cycles: BA, MA and Doctorate (based on relevant Qualifications Framework(s)/ Macro-profiles)

The descriptors formulated as meta learning outcomes are presented in a grit format equal to the EQF for LLL. The table will contain 5 to 8 dimensions, covering 3 times more descriptors distinguishing per dimension knowledge, skills and wider competences (Autonomy and responsibility). For each cycle, bachelor, master and doctorate, a table is produced.

### 5. *Student Workload and ECTS*

The workload of a typical degree programme is described here in terms of ECTS-credits:

—First cycle (180-210-240). —Second cycle (60-90-120). —Third cycle (120-180-240).

Trends and differences within the European higher education area in this subject area are highlighted.

### 6. *Learning, teaching & assessment*

A general description is offered here, what kind of learning, teaching and assessment methodologies and techniques are typically applied, with focus on communalities and differences. It is asked to include a minimum of three example of best practice based on the student-centred approach. These best practices should be based on a combination of generic and subject specific (knowledge and skills) competences.

### 7. *Quality enhancement*

Covers subject area related observations on the use of Tuning tools in programme design, delivery, monitoring and enhancement.





## 7. Higher Education Professional Staff Development and the Tuning Approach: Strategies for Designing Academic Programmes<sup>551</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*In the framework of the Tuning project a methodology has been developed for designing and implementing degree programmes based on the student-centred approach which requires an active role of students. Since this is a paradigm shift in comparison to the traditional expert-driven approach, it requires a change of mind-set of the teaching staff. Student-centred programmes should make students not only knowledgeable and skilled but also enable them to apply the obtained competences in practice. The approach presumes that every programme is unique and has its own articulated profile to best serve students' future and societal interests. The heart of the Tuning model, as presented in this chapter, is made-up of the concepts of (cycle) level descriptors, degree programme profiles, learning outcomes/competences, student workload and mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement. Each programme needs a well-designed profile for which a need has been identified. Such a profile is related to a selected set of subject specific and generic core competences which are phrased in terms of learning outcomes. The formulation of learning outcomes requires precision, meeting minimum criteria, including clear level indicators. The learning outcomes are also the basis for the most appropriate learning, teaching and assessment methods, which should be aligned. This chapter argues that every teacher, junior or senior, should have or obtain the toolbox of the concepts and methods outlined above to be able to take an active part in the discussions and activities – which should be team work – related to (re)-designing and implementing a degree programme.*

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<sup>551</sup> This chapter is an extended version of a paper entitled 'Teachers' professional development and the Tuning approach: strategies for designing academic programmes' published in: Ettore Felisatti and Anna Serbati, eds., *Prepare alla professionalità docente e innovare la didattica universitaria*. Milano: Franco Angeli, Milano, 2017, pp. 33-46. Parts are based on Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*. Bilbao and Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2003 and Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005. The essence of this two publications was published as Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process. An introduction*. Bilbao and Groningen, December 2006. This publication was reprinted in February 2008 and translated and published in Albanian, French, German, Georgian, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Serbian and Spanish.

## Introduction

*'We won't meet the needs for more and better higher education until professors become designers of learning experiences and not teachers.'* Larry D. Spence<sup>552</sup>

At a recent conference devoted to the modernisation of higher education programmes in Europe, the necessity was discussed to move from an expert-driven approach towards a student-centred one, and how this affects the design and delivery of study programmes and has implications for the teaching, learning and assessment strategies and methods to be applied. During one of the breaks, an experienced teacher and colleague approached the author of this book and explained his understanding of student-centred learning as students being offered the opportunity to raise questions during his lecture, followed by some interaction. The conversation took place in an only recently constructed higher education building which contained many class rooms of different sizes all with a lecture room lay-out with fixed seats. The mismatch between the student-centred paradigm and the state of and conditions for its implementation could not be illustrated better.

A nearly 20 years discourse about how to tailor higher education study programmes better to the needs of learners and society clearly had not reached this colleague, nor the staff responsible for furnishing the class rooms. Recent research shows that this should not come as a surprise, since both examples are (still) a good representation of the present situation in many higher education institutions. From this research, it can be learned that only those who were or had been actively involved in local, regional, national and/or international initiatives to reform higher education programmes had a better understanding of the new concepts and methodologies developed in the context of this discourse. The number of higher education institutions where the new paradigm has been implemented, is still quite limited.<sup>553</sup> For most academic teachers it is difficult to grasp the relevance of the approach, as they lack the theoretical and methodological rudiments to judge what good and relevant study programmes entail in today's world. They were never informed about or informed themselves, implying the vast majority of teachers is 'driving without a license'.

<sup>552</sup> Larry D. Spence, The case against teaching, in: *Change*, November/December 2001, 1-13, quote 2.

<sup>553</sup> Tim Birtwistle, Courtney Brown and Robert Wagenaar, A long way to go ... A study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education. Echoes from micro and macro Higher Education Reform processes*. Volume 3, No. 2, 2016; The conclusions of this report match with those of the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

Not surprisingly, this has raised concern, at EU level<sup>554</sup>, in national settings and in individual higher education institutions. As a consequence, in a number of countries tailored action has been taken. Good examples in this respect are the UK and the Netherlands. In the latter country, every higher education teacher with a permanent position is at present obliged to have acquired a postgraduate teaching qualification, called ‘Basiskwalificatie Onderwijs’.<sup>555</sup> This policy of certification resulted from an agreement, signed in 2008, by and between all research universities in the Netherlands.<sup>556</sup> It followed the paradigm shift advocated by the Bologna Process<sup>557</sup> and initiated by the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe projects<sup>558</sup> and the requirement of the Dutch national accreditation organisation to offer (better) evidence for teaching staff to be qualified.<sup>559</sup> The qualification is based on four components: ‘Design and redesign of teaching’, ‘Implementation of academic teaching and student supervision’, ‘Testing and assessment’ and ‘Evaluation’.<sup>560</sup> This is only one example of good practice, but of course there are many more.

## Taxonomies

Over 60 years after its initial publication, Bloom’s *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* <sup>561</sup> still stands as one of the most influential monographs in the field

<sup>554</sup> High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe’s higher education institutions*. June 2013. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013; High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, *Report to the European Commission on New modes of learning and teaching in higher education*. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, October 2014.

<sup>555</sup> University of Groningen, University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) as defined by the University of Groningen. Retrieved 2 June 2016: <http://www.rug.nl/society-business/centre-for-information-technology/education/teacher-development/basiscursussen/?lang=en>; Riekje de Jong, Jaap Mulder, Paul Deneer, and Hanno van Keulen, Poldering a teaching qualification system in Higher Education in the Netherlands: a typical Dutch phenomenon, in: *Revista de Docencia Universitaria*. Vol. 11, No. 3, 2013, 23-40.

<sup>556</sup> VSNU, Overeenkomst inzake wederzijdse erkenning basiskwalificatie onderwijs. Retrieved 2 June 2016: <http://www.vsnunl/files/documenten/Domeinen/Onderwijs/Docentkwaliteit%20overeenkomst.pdf>

<sup>557</sup> European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Official website: <http://www.ehea.info>. ; European Commission, The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, on the European Commission website. Retrieved 1 August 2016: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en.htm)

<sup>558</sup> Tuning, Europe website. <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

<sup>559</sup> NVAO Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders, *Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands*. The Hague, September 2016.

<sup>560</sup> University of Groningen, University Teaching Qualification (UTQ).

<sup>561</sup> B.S. Bloom, M.D. Engelhart, E.J. Furst, W.H. Hill and D.R. Krathwohl, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain. New York: David McKay Company, 1956.

of (higher) education and therefore remains a basic reference for the discourse with respect to evaluations, assessments, as well as curriculum development including learning and teaching. It is still obligatory reading in teachers' education programmes and used for staff training in many countries.

Taxonomies or classification systems might be of help to define reliable learning outcomes statements.<sup>562</sup> They are often presented as images to facilitate their use. Bloom's taxonomy distinguishes six levels of learning of ascending complexity: knowledge, comprehending, applying, analysing, synthesising and evaluating. In 2001 an update was made by Anderson and Krathwohl.<sup>563</sup> Taking these levels as a point of departure, so-called 'verb wheels' have been created linking these levels to active verbs (reflecting these levels) and aligning these to approaches of teaching, learning and assessment. Many of these wheels have been published on the web.

Although Bloom's handbook has experienced a revival linked to the promotion of the student-centred approach it seems not fully appropriate anymore as a result of new approaches that have come up since its publication in 1956. Nevertheless, over time it proved very influential regarding the debate on evaluation methodologies<sup>564</sup>, but far less on curriculum development.<sup>565</sup> Bloom distinguishes three domains of learning: cognitive, affective (attitudes and behaviour) and psychomotor. The first relates to the levels and is most used. What is expected from the learner is defined in active terms. This requires the use of active verbs – which have been visualised wheels – to formulate the learning outcomes, which should offer a firm basis for assessment. This also is the case for the affective domain or wider competences, such as interpersonal skills, attitudes and values. Bloom has ordered these in five ascending categories, being receiving (lowest level), responding, valuing, organizing and characterising (highest level).

In the 1980s it was concluded that the taxonomy needed revision because it did not capture sufficiently well the higher levels of thinking. This meant in practice an undermining of its hierarchical structure, both in terms of logic and as a result of empirical research. In particular, the two highest levels of learning

<sup>562</sup> SQA, *Use of Taxonomies in Assessing Higher-Order Skills. Policy and New Products. Research Report 10*. Prepared by Ann Galloway, 2008; Geraldine O'Neill and Feargal Murphy, Assessment. Guide to Taxonomies of Learning. UCB Teaching and Learning/ Resources, January 2010. Retrieved on 5 September 2017 from: <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/ucdtla0034.pdf>

<sup>563</sup> L.W. Anderson and D.R. Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing. A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Abridged edition, 2001, 31.

<sup>564</sup> "The idea for this classification system was formed at an informal meeting of college examiners attending the 1948 American Psychological Association Convention in Boston. At this meeting, interest was expressed in a theoretical framework which could be used to facilitate communication among examiners", in: B.S. Bloom et al., *A Taxonomy for Learning*, 4.

<sup>565</sup> R.J. Manzano and J. S. Kendall, *The New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. 2<sup>nd</sup>., California: Thousand Oaks, 2007.

identified by Bloom created problems: ‘synthesis’ and ‘evaluation’ (making judgements) in that order. This was because ‘evaluation’ could also be involved at other levels, and creation (of new knowledge) was absent. Some authors have argued that although the first three levels are hierarchical, the next three are learned in parallel. By 2007 over 20 updates or revisions were identified, including the one of Anderson and Krathwohl, the latter being the co-author of Bloom’s original taxonomy. Anderson et al. changed the order of the highest two levels and included ‘synthesising’ in the new term ‘creating’. Verbs typically related to evaluating/evaluate are appraise, argue, check, critique, defend, hypothesise, judge, select, support, value, weigh. For the most advanced level of learning the following verbs are typically applied: assemble, author, conjuncture, construct, design, develop, devise, formulate, invent, investigate.

In deviation from Bloom’s model and to overcome the criticisms, Anderson et al. introduced a two dimensions’ approach – replacing the linear cognitive one -, namely a cognitive process dimension and the knowledge dimension. It distinguishes in the last one four categories: factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive knowledge. Each requires different types of learning and therefore assessments. An alternative, already introduced in 1982, is John Biggs’ ‘structure of the observed learning outcome’ (*SOLO*), which presumes alignment of teaching, learning and assessment and expects active learning.<sup>566</sup> The activities students are expected to undertake should allow them to achieve the outcomes. Biggs distinguishes five hierarchical levels of which the first three are mainly quantitative – pre-structural, uni-structural and multi-structural – and the last two qualitative – relational and extended abstract. As in the case of Bloom and Anderson et al. appropriate verbs are used to indicate the required level.

A non-hierarchical taxonomy is the one developed by L. Dee Fink, published in 2003. It covers both the cognitive and affective domains, by making a distinction between six categories of learning: foundational knowledge (understanding and remembering: information and ideas); application (skills, critical, creative and practical thinking, managing projects); integration (connecting ideas, people, realms of life); human dimensions (learning about oneself and others); caring (developing new feelings, interests, values); and learning how to learn (becoming a better student, inquiring about a subject, self-directing learners). It intends to take new types and techniques of teaching and learning into account such as: role-playing, simulation, debate, case studies, writing to learn, small group learning (cooperative learning and team-based learning), assessment as learning, problem-based learning, service learning and online learning. Like the previous

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<sup>566</sup> John B. Biggs and Kevin F. Collis, *Evaluating the Quality of Learning. The SOLO Taxonomy (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome)*. New York, etc.: Academic Press, 1982. See also: J. Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1999.

mentioned taxonomies it also promotes to use verbs to indicate what is demanded from students in the future.<sup>567</sup>

In some other taxonomies more attention is given to the third domain of learning, the psychomotor, as well as to experimental domains. The psychomotor domain focuses on the co-ordination of brain and muscular activity and distinguish different levels from observation or imitation to the highest level of creativity (for example in the subject areas covering the Creative and Performing Arts).<sup>568</sup> Experimental learning relates to the extent to which the individual participates in or engages with the experience and the roles or tasks associated with.<sup>569</sup>

In the Tuning project it has been concluded that all taxonomies have their strengths and weaknesses, either missing out certain aspects or being too hierarchical. The main concern is however the importance given to verbs to indicate the appropriate level and/or what to demand. This has led to a discourse in itself.<sup>570</sup> Although verbs may be helpful, there are also obvious limitations in their use. It has to be acknowledged, for example, that they are – to a certain extent – arbitrary. Biggs has stipulated that each discipline may develop its own appropriate verbs to be applied in its own situation. For good reasons, because a particular verb might have differences in connotation for different areas, cultures, but also languages. Verbs might not easily be translated from one language to another language without a (significant) change in meaning.

## New concepts

Today's world is a competitive and complex one. This also applies to higher education. To offer attractive and effective education, it is necessary to make students not only knowledgeable but also able to apply that knowledge in practice. Traditional education which focuses only (or mainly) on knowledge acqui-

<sup>567</sup> L. Dee Fink, *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003, 20-22, 27-59, 74-79.

<sup>568</sup> P.M. Fitts and M.I. Posner, *Human performance*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1967. See also: Jordan A. Taylor and Richard B. Ivry, The role of strategies in motor learning. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, New York, 2012, pp. 1-12. Retrieved from: <https://www.princeton.edu/~ipalab/papers/Taylor%20and%20Ivry%20-%20The%20role%20of%20strategies%20in%20motor%20learning.pdf>.

<sup>569</sup> N. Steinaker and R. Bell, *The experiential taxonomy: A new approach to teaching and learning*. London: Academic Press, 1979.

<sup>570</sup> Clifford Adelman, Use and problems in the language of discipline-based qualification statements: learning from Tuning and its analogues. In: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Vol 1, No.2, 2014, pp. 335-376; Clifford Adelman, *To Imagine a Verb: The Language and Syntax of Learning Outcomes Statements*. Occasional Paper No. 24. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. February 2015.

sition and transfer is no longer sufficient in a highly dynamic society which requires a high level of flexibility. Education should not only make students acquainted with an academic field of study but should also focus on the competences –subject specific and generic – imperative to meet the needs of society and to prepare students well for their role in society, both in terms of employability and citizenship; the latter to be understood as social and civic engagement.<sup>571</sup>

To accommodate these requirements, the new paradigm of student-centred learning was developed in the last years of the previous century, although as a concept it has a longer history.<sup>572</sup> This approach requires interactive teaching and active learning and the development of core competences such as critical thinking and highly developed analysing and synthesizing skills.<sup>573</sup> However, to be successful in society and to contribute to it also other high level competences must be developed in the framework of a higher education degree programme, such as creativity, applying knowledge in practice, project work, leadership, teamwork, problem solving, entrepreneurial spirit, ethical commitment, communication skills and learning abilities. In most present programmes such generic competences are insufficiently ‘trained’. One of the reasons for this is that academic staff is reluctant, hesitant or not able to teach these competences, not having been educated themselves in how to do this.<sup>574</sup>

In this chapter relevant key concepts about the design and delivery of degree programmes are discussed. One might argue that the design of programmes is only a responsibility of senior staff, and that therefore there is no reason to make all members of staff acquainted with the full set of instruments from design to delivery, but this is a misconception. In student-centred programmes responsibilities are shared and it is necessary that all staff is informed about the complete cake a degree programme represents, not only their own slice. It is important not

<sup>571</sup> See for example: Richard A. Voorhees, ed., *Measuring What Matters. Competency-Based Learning Models*, in: *Higher Education. New Directions for Institutional Research*. No. 110. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, summer 2001; Robert M. Diamond, *Design and Assessing Course and Curricula. A Practical Guide*. Third edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008.

<sup>572</sup> W. Spady, *Outcome Based Education: Critical Issues and Answers*. American Association of School Administrators. Arlington VA., 1994; Robert B. Barr and John Tag, From Teaching to Learning. A new paradigm for undergraduate education, in: *Change The Magazine for Higher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 6, 1995, pp. 13-25; See also: Robert Wagenaar, Competences and Learning Outcomes: a panacea for understanding the (new) role of Higher Education?, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Vol. 1, No. 2, 2014, 279-302, included in this book as chapter 5.

<sup>573</sup> The term ‘core competences’ is by now an accepted one. See for example the chapter Linking Goals, Courses, and Curricula, in: Robert M. Diamond, *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula. A Practical Guide*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008, 83-93, in particular 86-87. The first edition of this book was published in 1998.

<sup>574</sup> International Tuning Academy Groningen, *A Long way to go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU and the USA*. Final report prepared by Tim Birtwistle and Robert Wagenaar. Groningen, 2016, 28.

only to see what the cake looks like now, but also to be informed why and how it was ‘baked’. Having basic knowledge of how a modern curriculum is built up and why, is a precondition for acting successfully in an educational environment that is based on the student-centred paradigm. A paradigm which by now is widely perceived as the most appropriate one for today’s world.<sup>575</sup>

As was outlined in the first two chapters, in 1999, 29 Ministers of Education launched a common initiative to modernise their higher education sector. As a reminder, the focus of this Bologna process was on the system level, in particular the switch to a two, later three cycle system to enhance the competitiveness of European higher education. Each of these cycles should prepare for the labour market.<sup>576</sup> In chapter 6 it was explained that for various reasons a group of universities initiated with support of the European Commission a grass-root project to claim a central role for academic staff in this modernisation process. One of the main aims of this Tuning project, was to develop a methodology that would facilitate the reform of higher education programmes by making them more relevant for the world of today and tomorrow: a robust approach to (re)design, develop, implement, deliver, sustain and enhance degree programmes.<sup>577</sup> These could be stand-alone programmes of one university as well as joint programmes offered by two or more higher education institutions. Joint to be understood as fully integrated programmes leading to a multiple, a double or a joint diploma.

The methodology departs from the notion that it should be simple and easy to understand. This was thought necessary because in 2000 – as stated before – the vast majority of staff was never trained in any way for teaching and therefore was not acquainted with educational theory and methodology. Staff development programmes simply did not exist and/or were not tailored to either modern approaches and/or the academic field involved. During the first phase of the Tuning project (2001-2002) Tuning found out – to its regret – that academics from other subject areas than education showed (very) limited interest in the insights developed in education sciences and teacher training. This situation does not seem to have changed much since then.

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<sup>575</sup> High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe’s higher education institutions*. June 2013. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013; Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009 – ‘The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade’. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009; Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101040/ministerial-conference-leuven-louvain-neuve-2009.html> , item 14: ‘Student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education’

<sup>576</sup> Bologna Declaration 1999 – European Ministers for Higher Education, *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education*. Bologna 19 June 1999. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100210/ministerial-conference-bologna-1999.html>

<sup>577</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*.



Tuning would become the very first transnational initiative of its size that pursued the change from staff-centred or expert driven education to student-centred learning.<sup>578</sup> The concept of student-centred learning was picked up in the London Bologna Communiqué of 2007 of the European Ministers of Education<sup>579</sup> and more extensively described in the 2009 Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué.<sup>580</sup> Tuning defined student-centred learning as “an approach or system that supports the design of learning programmes which focus on learners’ achievements, accommodate different learners’ priorities and are consistent with reasonable students’ workload (i.e. workload that is feasible within the duration of the learning programme). It accommodates for learners’ greater involvement in the choice of content, mode, pace and place of learning”.<sup>581</sup> An additional innovation was linking this student-centred approach to the concept of profiling which should promote flexibility and diversity, one of the axioms of the Tuning approach. A degree profile should – according to Tuning – ‘describe the specific characteristics of an educational programme or qualification in terms of features, learning outcomes and competences, following an agreed format’.<sup>582</sup>

The Tuning model – although straightforward in its design – is quite challenging as it requires the stipulated shift to a student-centred paradigm and thus

<sup>578</sup> Ibidem. See in particular 29-30 and 62-65.

<sup>579</sup> London Communiqué 2007 – Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world. London, 18 May 2007. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101763/ministerial-conference-london-2007.html>, in which it is stated: “There is an increasing awareness that a significant outcome of the process will be a move towards student-centred higher education and away from teacher driven provision. We will continue to support this important development.”

<sup>580</sup> Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009 – ‘The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade’. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009; Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101040/ministerial-conference-leuven-louvain-neuve-2009.html>

The document devotes a whole paragraph (no. 14) to the concept of student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education.

<sup>581</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff, Bas Wegewijs, Katja Durkin, Robert Wagenaar, Julia González, Ann Katherine Isaacs, Luigi F. Donà dalle Rose and Mary Gobbi, eds., *A Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles. Including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes*. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague, 2010, 57. This publication is the outcome of cooperation between five ENIC-NARICs, the Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie (NVAO) and Tuning. The project resulting was co-financed by the European Commission. Chapter 1 and large parts of the chapters 2 and 3 were initially prepared by the author of this book and commented by other members of the project team. Annex 3 containing examples of degree profiles for the subject areas History, Nursing and Physics are the prime responsibility of the coordinators of the subject areas groups which were established in the framework of the Tuning I-IV projects.

<sup>582</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, 52. A slightly more extended definition is included in Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Universities’ contribution to the Bologna Process. An introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. Bilbao and Groningen, 151.

a change of mindset of the academic staff responsible for designing and implementing an educational programme. Instead of teaching personal academic interests academic staff must focus on the question how a programme and their courses as part of it, can serve students' future and societal interests best. This implies objective and careful considerations of the dynamics of the labour market, the current developments of the subject area, emerging communication and technological innovations, etc. In other words, the desired outcomes of the programme should be leading for the (re)organisation of the programme.

The student-centred approach presumes the concept of active learning. Active learning has been defined as “a process whereby students engage in activities, such as reading, writing, discussion, or problem solving that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content. Cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and the use of case methods and simulations are some approaches that promote active learning”.<sup>583</sup> The European Student Union and Education International included active learning – as the term for more modern learning, teaching and assessment methodologies and techniques – in their definition of student-centred learning: “A learning approach characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and students and which takes students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable [generic] skills such as problem-solving, critical and reflective thinking”.<sup>584</sup> In more simple terms active learning can be perceived as ‘learning by doing’ or ‘learning by action’ (of students) in an academic environment.<sup>585</sup>

Anno 2018, as will be outlined in next chapters, most programmes in Europe are still delivered on the basis of tradition, academic interests of staff members and constrained by the (limited) resources available as was the case when the Bologna Process was launched. Today, these programmes are labelled as input-based, staff-centred or expert-driven. Typical features of this type of programmes is that they are based on general aims and objectives, the combined interests of the academic staff, focused on knowledge acquisition and transfer, rigid but at the same time rather loosely organised educational units, missing well-structured progression routing. There is typically limited communication and coordination between the staff involved and a shared responsibility for the outcomes of the programme is not really felt by the staff.

<sup>583</sup> Centre for Research on Learning and Teaching, Introduction to active learning, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Retrieved 3 June 2016: <http://www.crit.umich.edu/tstrategies/tsal>

<sup>584</sup> Education International and European Student Union, *Time for a new paradigm in education: student-centred-learning. Learning SCL toolkit*, Brussels, 2010, 4. Retrieved from: [http://www.aic.lv/bolona/2010/Reports/SCL\\_toolkit\\_ESU\\_EI.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/bolona/2010/Reports/SCL_toolkit_ESU_EI.pdf).

<sup>585</sup> ‘Active learning’ is an acknowledged field of research having its own peer review international journal since 2000 published by Sage: *Active Learning in Higher Education*: ‘publication for all those who teach and support learning in higher education and those who undertake or use research into effective learning, teaching and assessment in universities and colleges’.

## Student-centred

Student-centred programmes, on the contrary, should be designed and delivered in such a way that students will become acquainted with a deliberate mixture of subject specific competences – covering disciplinary knowledge, understanding and skills – and generic competences, which are considered useful and necessary for the academic, professional and/or vocational area. According to the Tuning philosophy both types of competences should be learned in an integrated way. The way general competences are trained, perceived and owned by its learners will be different between academic sectors/ domains.<sup>586</sup>

Although student-centred programmes allow for and promote individualized learning profiles – are preferably modularized and make maximum use of options on offer – this does not mean that its concept is equal to a ‘cafeteria model’.<sup>587</sup> It seems to be a persistent misunderstanding, both among staff and students, that student-centred programmes allow students to compose their own degree programmes.<sup>588</sup> According to the Tuning methodology a programme should always be consistent, meet minimum quality standards and make maximum use of the time available to the student to reach the optimum in terms of key competences to be developed. It is in the interest of both the student and the institution to facilitate personalized profiles that give room to personal interests and strengths of the student. This can be realized on the basis of a major/minor model and/or a combination of mandatory course units, optional course units and electives, including a mobility period and a work placement. It is called the guided-path-

<sup>586</sup> See for a review of studies related to the concept of student-centred learning: Marlies Baeten, Eva Kyndt, Katrien Struyven and Filip Dochy, Review. Using student-centred learning environments to stimulate deep approaches to learning: Factors encouraging or discouraging their effectiveness, in: *Educational Research Review*. Vol. 5, 2010, pp. 243–260.

<sup>587</sup> See for example: T. Bailey, T., S.S. Jaggars and D. Jenkins, *What we know about guided pathways*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/What-We-Know-Guided-Pathways.pdf>; The term is also applied in the first Trends Report (2001) referring to the US system allowing for a ‘very flexible, “boneless” or “cafeteria” model’. Retrieved from: [http://www.eua.be/Libraries/higher-education/offdoc\\_bp\\_trend\\_i-1068715136182.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.eua.be/Libraries/higher-education/offdoc_bp_trend_i-1068715136182.pdf?sfvrsn=0). This stills seems to be a serious issue of concern in the US: Thomas Bailey, Rethinking the ‘cafeteria’ approach to community college, in: *The Washington Post*, 11 May 2015. Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/redesigning-community-colleges/2015/05/11/c75e4584-f7f5-11e4-9030-b4732caefe81\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.3ebda6bc49d2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/redesigning-community-colleges/2015/05/11/c75e4584-f7f5-11e4-9030-b4732caefe81_story.html?utm_term=.3ebda6bc49d2)

<sup>588</sup> Steven Mintz, The Future of Higher Education. *Inside Higher Education*, September 30, 2014. Retrieved 1 August 2016 from: <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-beta/future-higher-education>; See for the debate about student choice: *Geraldine O’Neill and Tim McMahon*, Student-centred learning: What does it mean for students and lecturers? In: G. O’Neill, S. Moore and B. McMullin, eds., *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*. Dublin: AISHE, 2005. Retrieved on 25 July 2016 from: <http://www.jfn.ac.lk/OBESCL/MOHE/SCL-articles/Academic-articles/14.SCL-2.pdf>

ways approach or model.<sup>589</sup> In any case, each individual study programme should be approved by the Examination Board to guarantee that the programme learning outcomes can be achieved. Degree programmes should be ‘fit in purpose’ and ‘fit for purpose’, which implies that the outcomes of the learning process should meet the aims of the programme (guaranteeing its quality), but also that those outcomes should meet the needs and expectations of students and society, ensuring employment, personal development and social and civic engagement.

The heart of the Tuning model is made-up of (cycle) level descriptors, profiles, learning outcomes/ competences, student workload and mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement. It assumes that every degree programme is in accordance with the cycle level descriptors agreed at European and national level. The general descriptors have been summarized in qualifications frameworks. They offer a general reference to what is expected when graduating from a particular cycle, obtaining an associated, bachelor, master or doctoral degree. These qualifications frameworks are supplemented by frameworks at sectoral and at subject area level. Besides developing a model for reforming degree programmes based on a cycle system, Tuning has invested a lot of effort in developing both frameworks offering reference points of which competences should preferably be developed, while allowing for autonomy in the actual design and implementation of programmes. However, the choices made should be clearly motivated. This is why it is so important for a degree programme to have a well-articulated profile.

## Degree Profiles

The role of the degree profile, a term introduced by Tuning<sup>590</sup>, is multi-functional. A good academic-professional profile takes into account different stakeholders and users’ perspectives and interests, such as the (potential) students, parents, graduates of the programme, the academic community, professional organisations, (potential) employers, society at large, including (national) decision makers. It serves as the ‘shield’ of a degree programme by showing its relevance for society, offering identity to the degree holder by showing his/her main (academic and social) interests; detecting its function in terms of occupations and tasks a graduate is able to carry out; showing context, that is the environment in which the graduate is able to function successfully; and finally, identifying the

<sup>589</sup> See in relation to US education: Rachel Mullins Veney and Lara H. Sugimoto, Transforming Higher Education: The Guided Pathways Approach. In: *EduCauseReview*, 19 June 2017. Retrieved from: <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2017/6/transforming-higher-education-the-guided-pathways-approach>

<sup>590</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures. An introduction*, 151.

education obtained by defining the main intended and achieved learning outcomes defined in terms of the level of general and subject specific competences.

The degree profile is also the key transparency instrument and reference regarding the learning process. Students must clearly know beforehand what each degree programme entails and which outcomes they can expect from it. Graduates need to be able to show others what competences they have gained during the learning experience. It should provide a succinct and focussed way of expressing and communicating the most important outcomes of a higher education programme, and thus provides an essential tool for communication, transparency and recognition.

It surpasses the simple notification that a graduate has a degree in a certain discipline. Each degree programme has its own identity, based on agreed reference points for one, and in the case of a multi- or inter-disciplinary programme, more academic fields. It also contains specific elements developed by the higher education institution that offers it. These specific elements might be determined, for example, by the mission of the institution and the particular strengths or orientation of a faculty, school or department, and often by particular constraints and opportunities deriving from the national educational system or the local or regional economy. It is important to stress that the degree profile should be drawn up by a group of informed persons, including staff members, supporting-staff and students' representatives of the programme described. The profile should be very concise and it needs to be very clear, which means that each word should be carefully considered. According to Tuning it is made up of seven entries including a general one that provides the official name and offering basic information about the type of degree, institution and status (accreditation).<sup>591</sup> The other entries of the profile are:

- Purpose: a synthetic overview of its aims and objectives
- Characteristics: mono-, multi- or interdisciplinary, general or specialist, orientation (research based, applied, regulated, etc.)
- Employability & further education: professional and succeeding learning opportunities related to the set of competences obtained/ learning outcomes met
- Education style: typology of learning and teaching strategies and methods
- Programme competences: key general and subject specific competences covered
- List of programme learning outcomes

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<sup>591</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff, et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, 27-49. The model and its seven entries – which are clarified in detail – is the outcome of an intensive discussion of the project team, involving ENIC-NARIC credential evaluators and NVAO degree accreditors as well as Tuning experts, its core team and the coordinators of three subject areas, Nursing, Physics and History.

It is very much in the interest of the graduate to integrate the profile in the Diploma Supplement. This supplement, initiated by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES is an annex to the diploma based on a fixed format which offers detail about type and level of the degree, content of the programme and outcomes of the learning process.

## Competences

The degree profile, the set of competences to be developed and the learning outcomes to achieve are interlinked, with each cycle having its own profile and set of core competences/outcomes. This is according to the Bologna principle that every degree should be an entity in itself and should give access to/prepare for the labour market (besides preparing for further education in the case of the two first cycles). The terminology applied here has been explained in more detail in chapter 5, *Competences and learning outcomes: A panacea for understanding the (new) role of Higher Education?*

Tuning makes a clear distinction between ‘competences’ and ‘learning outcomes’ to differentiate ‘subject’ and ‘level’ and it relates the responsibilities of the most relevant players: academic staff and students to these terms. A ‘competence’ according to Tuning is a ‘quality, ability, capacity’ grounded in knowledge, and skills, developed, obtained and owned by the student. It is the student that is becoming competent as the result of a learning process. This is reflected in the following Tuning definition of competences, which is holistic, covering both purely theoretical/methodological concepts as well as vocational knowledge and skills.:

*“Competences represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, demonstration of knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values. Fostering these is the object of all educational programmes. Competences are developed in all course units and assessed at different stages of a programme. Some competences are subject-area related (specific to a field of studies), while others are general (common to any degree programme). It is normally the case that competence development proceeds in an integrated and cyclical manner throughout the programme.”<sup>592</sup>*

The competences to be included in the degree profile are named ‘key or core programme competences’, being the most important ones – the corner stones or cap stones – which the graduate will have obtained or further developed as a result of the specific programme. The exact mix of core competences

<sup>592</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, R., eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. An introduction*, 147-8.

covered in degree profiles will differ between programmes, even in the same academic or professional area. However, it should be expected that most programme competences will be similar or comparable between, say, two first cycle programmes in different HEIs in the same subject area. However, there might be slight differences related to degree profiles, given the fact that each institution makes its own choices based on its mission, specialisations and available means. This should not be perceived as an obstacle in terms of compatibility and recognition.

As part of the degree profile it is thought necessary also to describe competences. The statements used to formulate competences are normally short: they indicate an area of capability, which might be connected to a field of knowledge, a skill or related to another competence. One can think for example of 'ability to undertake research at an appropriate level', 'ability to apply knowledge in practice' and 'ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in a first and second language'. In practice, competences are developed in the framework of a particular subject area. Therefore, it is very useful to link a particular competence to the context in which the competence will actually be applied. This will provide an indication of the level to which the competence is developed in the framework of a degree programme, e.g. a bachelor or a master. As a result a competence statement comes close to a measurable learning outcome as is discussed below. In each degree programme a number of key or core competences are developed in a progressive way. This implies that competences are included in different course units. It is visualized in the image below<sup>593</sup> and can be illustrated with a concrete example: teamwork.

Teamwork has been defined in Tuning as 'actively joining and participating in the attainment of shared objectives with other persons and entities, within and outside the organisation. It has identified three levels of subsequent mastery: 1. Active participating and collaborating in team tasks and promoting confidence, cordiality and focus on shared work; 2. Contributing to the consolidation and development of the team, fostering communication, balanced distribution of work, good team atmosphere and cohesion; 3. Directing groups, ensuring member integration and high-performance orientation.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>593</sup> Published for the first time in Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005, 36 and prepared by the author of this book.

<sup>594</sup> Aurelio Villa Sánchez & Manuel Poblete Ruiz, eds., *Competence-based learning. A proposal for the assessment of generic competences*. Bilbao: University of Deusto, 2008, 241.

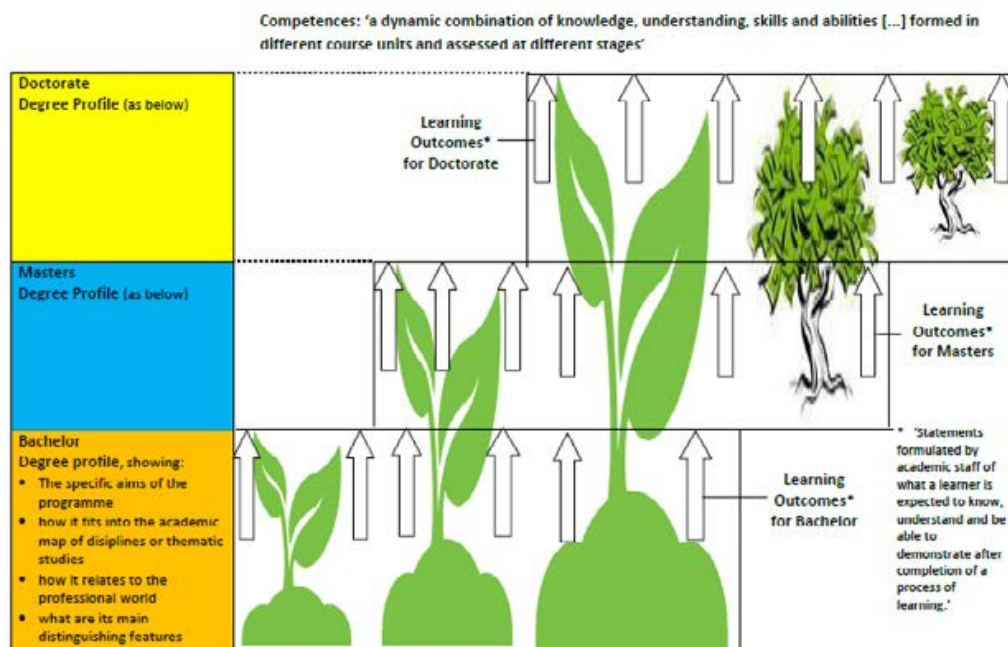
Image 1: Tuning Competences/Learning Outcomes – Course unit grid

Course unit	Competence									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	F
Unit 1	X		X					X		
Unit 2		X		X			X			X
Unit 3		X			X		X			
Unit 4	X		X						X	

X = This Competence is developed and assessed in this unit and formulated as a Learning Outcome to indicate level.

Nowadays, this type of grid or matrix is widely used in various countries to show what competences are developed in what course units, and to what level. Competence development can also take place in and over different cycles, as is shown below.<sup>595</sup>

Image 2: Tuning competence development model



Author: Jeremy Cox, Polifonia Network, for TUNING and adjusted by Robert Wagenaar

<sup>595</sup> This image was first published in Jenneke Lokhoff et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, 38.



Some competences can be developed progressively and sequentially during the three successive higher education cycles, while work on others may be limited to one or two cycles. When a competence is developed in the Master or Doctoral phase only, it is rooted, nonetheless, in the learning already achieved in the previous cycles, Bachelor and/or Master. An appropriate example in this respect is ‘ability for abstract and analytical thinking and synthesis of ideas’, which includes three levels of learning typically spread over the first and second cycle, bachelor and master. When synthesising is understood in terms of developing new ideas, building on existing ones, it also covers the third cycle or doctorate.

Because generic and subject specific competences are learned in conjunction, Tuning has developed the concept of meta-profiles. Meta-profiles offer an ordering or grouping of the core competences on the basis of so-called dimensions. A dimension indicates a constructive key element which defines a subject area; each subject area is based on a multiple of dimensions. See for further detail about this concept the chapters 9, *Columbus’ Egg? Qualifications Frameworks, Sectoral Profiles and Degree Programme Profiles in Higher Education* and 10, *Developing a new strategy for defining and measuring what is needed: Agreeing common ground*. Dimensions are used to order the core competences identified on the basis of knowledge, skills and wider competences, by applying a model in which the Bologna Qualifications Framework for the EHEA is merged with the EU European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

## Learning outcomes

While a ‘competence’ according to Tuning is a ‘quality, ability, capacity’ grounded in knowledge, and skills, developed, obtained and owned by the student, a learning outcome is a measurable statement of a learning experience – formulated by the academic staff – which defines level/ extent/ standard of a competence to be formed or enhanced. In practice, a distinction is made between intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes, expressing what is expected and what is realised after passing forms of assessment. Another known distinction is ‘desirable’ learning outcomes versus ‘threshold’ learning outcomes. The first indicates the expectations of the teaching staff of a typical student. The second defines minimum standards. Both will only function when supported by clear assessment criteria to define what typical is and what the border line is between fail and pass. The full definition applied by Tuning is the following:

*“Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. They can refer to a single course unit or module, a combination of units or modules,*

*e.g. a minor programme an elective or a full cycle programme. Learning outcomes specify the requirements for award of credit.*<sup>596</sup>

A distinction is made between *programme learning outcomes* and *unit or module learning outcomes*. Both a major and a minor programme have programme learning outcomes, since they are consistent entities. The purpose of learning outcomes is to describe accurately the verifiable learning achievements of a student at a given point in time, for example at the end of a degree-course, a module or, for instance, a period of learning in the workplace. They are concrete and verifiable signs that witness/certify how the planned competences, including the required levels of knowledge, are being developed or acquired. Statements of learning outcomes can be formulated to describe any type of learning that can be validated, whether it is achieved in a formal or a non-formal or informal setting. Programme learning outcomes are formulated broader than unit learning outcomes, but in all cases they are based on the identified set of competences to be developed in the study programme. A number of generic and subject specific competences might be combined in one programme learning outcome.

A programme learning outcome is the outcome of progressively defined unit learning outcomes. For reason of precision it might be necessary to split a programme learning outcome – independently from the level issue – in two or three unit learning outcomes, which together should cover that programme learning outcome. In terms of progression of learning: the highest level reflected in the learning outcome of a unit should match the level of the programme learning outcome. To illustrate this in the image below three progression levels are distinguished, with number 3 being equal to the programme learning outcome.

*Image 3: Relation core (general and subject specific) competence(s) – programme learning outcomes – unit(s) learning outcome*



<sup>596</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, R., eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. An introduction*, 16-17.

In this image core or key competences can be understood as ‘dimensions’, which are packages of related subject area and generic competences defined according to the model of meta-frameworks.<sup>597</sup> In that case, the unit learning outcomes are in practice sub-descriptors of the programme learning outcomes, based on the progressive learning descriptors of ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’ and ‘wider competences’, equalling the levels 1 to 3. As mentioned before, this model is outlined in chapter 10, *Developing a new strategy for defining and measuring what is needed: Agreeing common ground*.

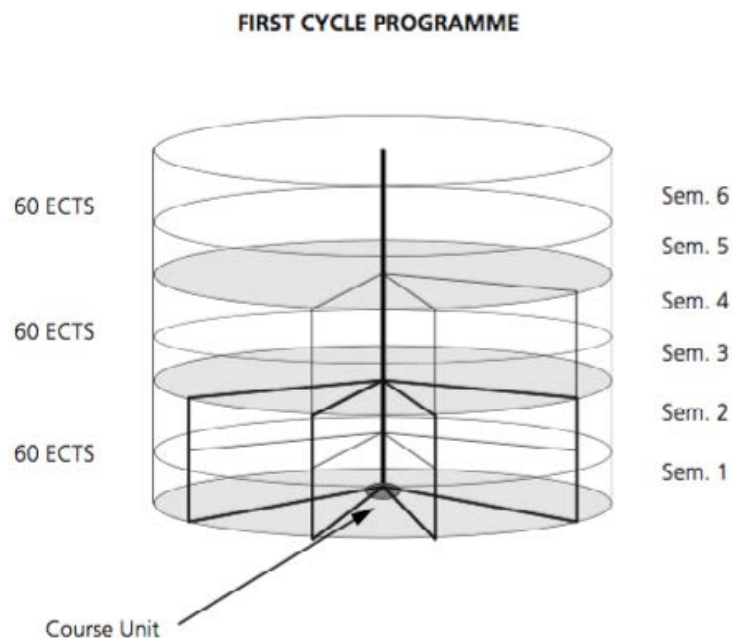
Designing study programmes and defining programme competences and learning outcomes requires careful planning and teamwork by the responsible staff. In student-centred or output-oriented programmes all staff involved in offering parts of the degree programme have a shared responsibility for its outcomes and for conducting the units or modules of which the programme is constructed. The learning outcomes of the individual units should, together, result in the level of competences to be obtained by the student, to be verified by the overall learning outcomes. According to the Tuning methodology all units are – in one way or another – related to each other. This not only applies to the units or modules which are part of the major or core part of the programme, but also to minor course units and electives. In a well-designed programme, minors and electives should strengthen the profile of the programme while giving learners the ability to ‘custom fit’ the programme to their needs. Programmes normally presume progression regarding the level of competences to be obtained and hence the learning outcomes to be achieved. As a consequence, the learning outcomes of units/modules which develop the competences at the highest level should precisely match the programme learning outcomes.

As stated before, in the vision of Tuning a degree programme can be seen as a large cake, with different layers or levels, in which all slices are linked to one other, either in a horizontal or in a vertical way. In more formal educational terms: the learning outcomes of the individual units or modules add to the programme learning outcomes and to the development of the level of competences, taking into full consideration the learning outcomes to be achieved in other units. This concept can be visualized in a more schematic form as the following image shows<sup>598</sup>. This image is limited to a first cycle or bachelor programme, but a comparable image can be designed for a second cycle, master programme, or even a (taught) three cycle or doctoral programme.

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<sup>597</sup> González, Julia and Maria Yarosh, *Buiding Degree Profiles. The Tuning Approach*, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Issue No. 1, November 2013, pp. 37-69.

<sup>598</sup> Published for the first time in Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II*, 37 and designed by the author of this book.

*Image 4: Tuning comprehensive degree programme model*

The model allows that a programme is taken according to its formal design, semester by semester, but it also allows for a student to study one part of a programme in greater depth, by taking two topic related units (or slices) of different levels successively if the prerequisites (entrance conditions) of the higher level unit allows for this. One can imagine that a student studying a language will focus first on language acquisition and will then concentrate on either literature or linguistics, although the official order of the programme might be different. It also shows that separate units, taken successfully in another context, can be fitted into the study programme on the basis of recognition of prior learning. In a lifelong learning context and in more flexible programmes this might be very relevant.

In this respect the definition of competences statements, but most of all of (programme) learning outcomes is of crucial importance. In order for the model to work, learning outcomes should be formulated very precisely. Phrasing them is a skill in itself, which is facilitated by making it a joint effort of the academic staff. The more experience one has in writing learning outcomes, the easier it is to write good ones. Characteristics of verifiable, comprehensible and observable learning outcomes being 'specific' (giving sufficient detail, written in clear language), 'objective' (formulated in a neutral way, avoiding opinions and ambiguities), 'achievable' (feasible in the given timeframe and with the resources available), 'useful' (they should be perceived as relevant for higher education studies and civil society), 'relevant' (should contribute to the aim of

the qualification involved) and ‘standard-setting’ (indicate the standard to be achieved).<sup>599</sup>

Not being sufficiently satisfied with existing taxonomies, as outlined above, and other models<sup>600</sup>, Tuning developed its own more precise format, distinguishing five key components that a well-written learning outcome should include:

1. An **active verb form**;
2. An indication of the **type** of learning outcome (LO): knowledge, cognitive processes, skills, or other competences;
3. The **topic** area of the LO: this can be specific or general and refers to the subject matter, field of knowledge or a particular skill;
4. An indication of the **standard** or the **level** that is intended/ achieved by the LO;
5. The **scope** and/or **context** of the LO.<sup>601</sup>

Besides the verb used, the two last components should offer (together) a clear indication of the level to be achieved. If these elements are missing, then instead of a learning outcome a competence statement has been defined. Practical experience has shown that the verb alone is an insufficient and unreliable indicator.<sup>602</sup> This is supported by a recent analysis made by Claudia J. Stanny of 30 lists of measurable verbs published on the Web which are aligned with the six categories of Bloom’s taxonomy. Her conclusion is that there is lack of consistency in how these lists align verbs with the identified levels of learning. She stipulates that ‘the action verbs we associate with levels of Bloom’s taxonomy have specific and unambiguous meanings. Out of context, these verbs lose their specificity. However, in the context created by other verbs (e.g., a list of verbs for a taxonomy), a verb might take on one meaning, but may acquire a different meaning in the context created by a different set of verbs identified for a different level in the taxonomy. The context created by the object of an SLO [student learning outcome] also creates specificity of meaning’. This implies a conformation of the position taken by Tuning that both the verb and the remaining content of a learning outcome should be considered when making judgements about the level of the expertise described by the learning outcome.<sup>603</sup>

<sup>599</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff, et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, 44.

<sup>600</sup> See for example Jenny Moon, *The Module & Programme Development Handbook. A practical guide to linking levels, learning outcomes & assessment*. New York: Abingdon, Oxon, 2002, who distinguishes three components a well-written learning outcome should contain: a verb, an indication regarding the expected action and an indication of the nature of the performance required.

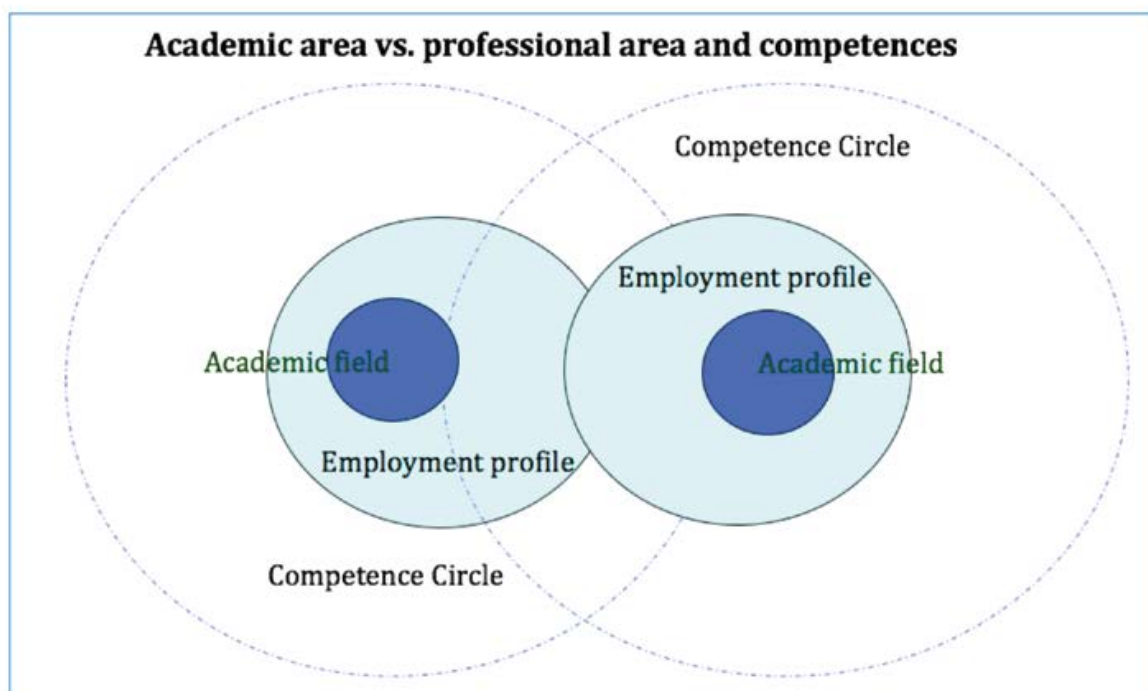
<sup>601</sup> Lokhoff, et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, 45.

<sup>602</sup> This point of view challenges the opinion of for example Cliff Adelman, see note 570.

<sup>603</sup> Claudia J. Stanny, *Reevaluating Bloom’s Taxonomy: What Measurable Verbs Can and Cannot Say about Student Learning*, in: *Education Sciences*. Vol. 6, No. 37, 2016, pp. 1-12, quote 9-10.

Practice shows that higher education staff (sometimes) has difficulties to understand the relationship between competences and learning outcomes, because they are often not very well informed about these concepts.<sup>604</sup> This is probably one of the reasons why the Bologna Follow-up Group and national quality assurance and accreditations organisations developed the policy to avoid the term ‘competences’ and to limit themselves to the term ‘learning outcomes’. Another reason seems to be that in the UK traditionally competences are associated with vocational education. This, however, is not the case in continental Europe and the United States.<sup>605</sup> Avoiding the term competences is not very fruitful, because it is the language that bridges the higher education sector and the world of work. This is visualized in this image:

*Image 5: Relation programme profile, employment profile and competences profile*



<sup>604</sup> In the context of the research study Tuning EU-US the website and course catalogues were analysed. It shows a mixing up of terminology in many universities visited, although there are examples of excellent practice: Tim Birtwistle, Courtney Brown and Robert Wagenaar, A long way to go ..., 440-441.

<sup>605</sup> Mulder, M., T. Weigel and K. Collins, The concept of competence in the development of vocational education and training in selected EU member states. A critical analysis, in: *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol. 59, No.1, 2006, pp. 65-85.

It shows the relationship between the academic field, offering different degree programmes which prepare for a much wider circle of occupations than just the academic field. Although different per sector and type of institution, the vast majority of graduates will find employment which is not one-to-one related to their field of specialisation. While the employment profile is mainly based on the subject specific competences obtained, the generic competences – in particular – allow for suitable jobs which lie outside the realm of both academic field and employment profile. The competence profile becomes wider when more generic competences such as analysing and synthesising, learning to learn, problem solving, applying knowledge in practice, teamwork, entrepreneurship, project work, leadership, communication skills and creativity and innovativeness are trained in the context of the degree programme. Although these can be formulated in terms of learning outcomes statements to indicate the level to be obtained, it is a language that is not used and understood outside the higher education sector. An alternative might be to use the term ‘skills’ but as the EQF for Lifelong Learning shows us these can be understood as a more technical capacity, instead of referring to the application of a competence in practice, i.e. the ability to show ‘responsibility and autonomy’.<sup>606</sup> The image also shows that an employment profile and a competence circle can compete/ overlap with those of another academic field. This enhances the chances for employment.

## Student workload

After defining the profile, identifying the competences to be developed and the level to be achieved set in terms of the programme learning outcomes, the next step is building the actual programme. The first choice to be made is whether it should be modularized or not, that is to apply units which have a fixed number of credits or its multiple. For example, units of 5, 10, 15 and 20 ECTS credits, or 3, 6 and 12. The modularized system facilitates not only flexible programmes and individual pathways which allow for profiling by students, but also simplifies recognition of units taken at another department, faculty or institution.

When constructing a degree programme in terms of course units – modularized or not – it is a necessity to take student workload into account to be fair

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<sup>606</sup> European Commission, *The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)*, 2008; see for the official document: Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01). In: *Official Journal of the European Union* 6.5.2008; European Commission, *Explaining the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*. Brussels, 2008.

to the students. Because in Europe it is assumed that the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is applied, it is taken for granted that its principles are respected. More background information about the ECTS which was remodelled from a transfer system into a transfer and accumulation system by Tuning in the years 2001-2002 – and founded on the student-centred approach – can be found in chapter 4, *Making the Jump. From a European credit transfer system towards an overarching accumulation system*. Point of departure is the principle that a full academic year of 9-10 months of study reflects 1500 – 1800 working hours. This implies that one credit stands for 25 to 30 hours of work. Credits involve the completion of all planned activities such as attending lectures, seminars, independent and private study, placements, preparation of projects, examinations, and so forth. Credits are only awarded after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved. Credits are allocated to all educational components of a study programme (such as modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.) and reflect *only* the quantity of work each component requires to achieve its learning outcomes in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full academic year successfully.

Tuning has shown that approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have an impact on the workload required to achieve the desired learning outcomes and, consequently, on credit allocation. Workload, teaching methods and learning outcomes are clearly related to each other. However, there are other relevant elements. In achieving the intended learning outcomes a large number of interrelated factors play a role. The diversity of traditions has to be taken into account, as well as curriculum design and context, coherence of the curriculum, teaching organisation, ability and diligence of the student. In other words, the time required to achieve the same learning outcomes may vary according to the context.

To support staff in defining a fair student workload for their programme and units Tuning has developed an approach for determining this. Such a mechanism is thought necessary for a credit system to work.<sup>607</sup>

When deciding on the student workload the following elements are of relevance:

- The student has a fixed amount of time depending on the programme he/she is taking
- The overall responsibility for the design of a programme of studies and the number of credits allocated to courses lies with the responsible legal body, e.g. faculty executive board, etc.

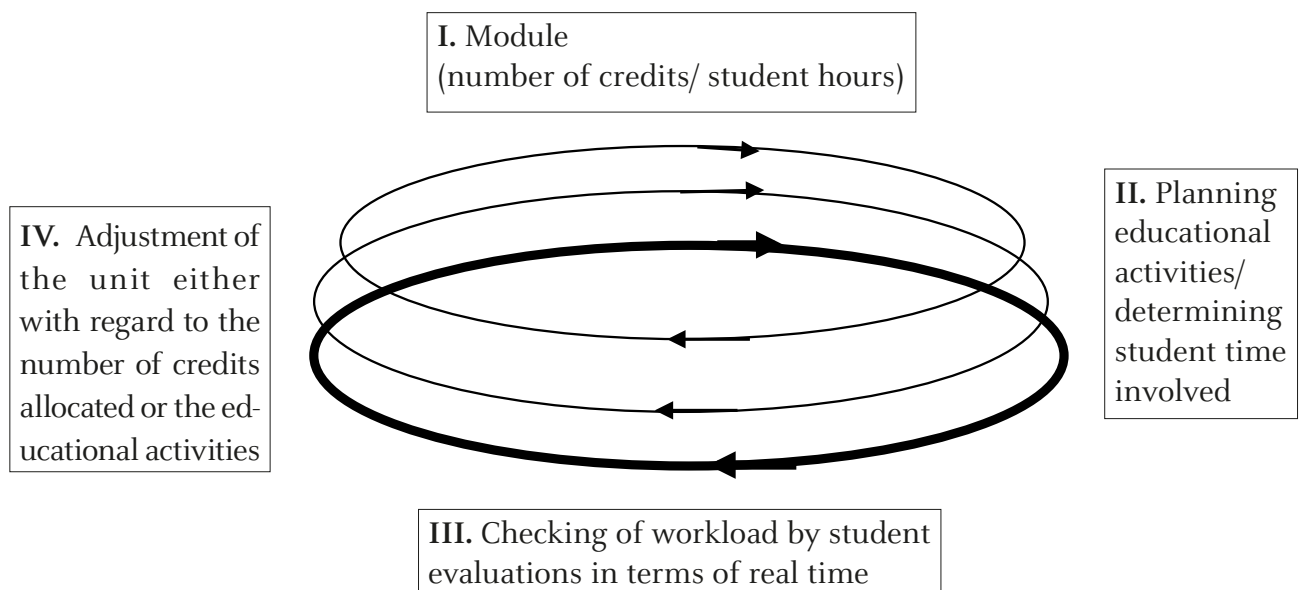
<sup>607</sup> This approach was originally published in Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005, 162-167. The main text was prepared by the author of this book.



- The final responsibility for deciding on the teaching, learning and assessment activities for a particular amount of student time is delegated by faculty and university authorities to the teacher or the responsible team of staff
- It is crucial that the teacher be aware of the specific learning outcomes to be achieved and the competences to be obtained
- The teacher should reflect on which educational activities are more relevant to reach the learning outcomes of the module/ course unit
- The teacher should have a notion of the average student work time required for each of the activities selected for the module/ course unit.
- The student has a crucial role in the monitoring process to determine whether the estimated student workload is realistic, although monitoring is also a responsibility of the teaching staff.

This can be visualized in the following model:

*Image 6: Tuning quality circle to estimate, evaluate and adjust student workload*



To realize the overall objective, namely the development of an approach which leads to a truly valid consideration of student workload, implementation of a four steps approach is recommended: (1) introducing modules/course units; (2) estimating student workload; (3) Checking the estimated workload through student evaluations and (4) Adjustment of workload and/or educational activities. Step one requires that the choice is made to apply a modularized or non-modularized system. In step 2 the set of learning activities to meet the learning outcomes should be in balance with the calculated or set student workload expressed in ECTS credits. This involves choices regarding the type of learning activities, modes of instruction and

types of assessment. Step 3 is a necessity to check whether the student workload is feasible. If required as an outcome of step 3 either the number of ECTS credits or the intended learning outcomes will be adjusted.

The application of this four-step Tuning model is based on the correlation of a number of decisive elements:

- the degree profile which indicates the place of the module in the overall programme of studies, as well as the competences to be developed in the module
- the target group, the level of the module and any existing entrance requirements
- the learning outcomes formulated for the module
- the educational activities which best suit the learning outcomes to be achieved
- the types of assessment that are considered most appropriate to the learning outcomes
- the average work time (in hours), based on student workload, required to perform the educational activities which are necessary to achieve the learning outcomes.

For estimating the student-workload the following model can be used. The same scheme can also be used by students to indicate the actual amount of time spent on the module, thus providing an opportunity to check whether the calculated workload corresponds to reality. Students are given the form completed by the teacher where only the estimated workload is not shown. By using these forms both teacher and students may become aware of the learning outcomes, their relationship to the competences being developed and the average student time involved for each of the tasks.

*Image 7: Model for the planning and evaluation of student workload*

<b>Intended Learning outcome</b> (based on the list of competences identified for this module)*	<b>Educational activity/ies</b> (based on identified learning and teaching modes)**	<b>Assessment</b> (based on most appropriate mode(s) of assessment)	<b>Estimated student work time in hours</b>
<i>[All boxes to be completed by the teacher]</i>			

\* A competence can have one or multiple learning outcomes. It should be normal practice to develop a variety of subject specific [body of knowledge and related disciplinary (technical)

skills] and generic competences (e.g. teamwork, oral and written communication, debating techniques, etc.). It is advised to limit for each course unit the number of learning outcomes to 5 to 6 (depending on the size of the unit).

\*\* An educational activity can involve more than one competence/learning outcome.

## Learning, teaching and assessment

On the basis of the outlined methodology, Tuning developed a ten-step-approach to design new programmes or to improve existing ones. This model is included in annex 1 to this chapter.<sup>608</sup> Discussed so far have been step 2 of this model ‘Defining the key profile and key competences’, step 3 ‘Formulating the programme learning outcomes’, step 4 ‘Decide whether to ‘modularise’ or not’ and – in more general terms – step 5 ‘Identifying competences and formulate learning outcomes for each module’. Although all these steps should be familiar to every teacher, step 6 ‘Determine the approaches to teaching, learning and assessment’ is probably the most crucial one in the process of offering degree programmes which meet the requirements of both the academic and professional world and society. A programme defined in terms of competences and learning outcomes requires a well-defined strategy for the learning, teaching and assessment methods to be applied, as well as their alignment.<sup>609</sup>

Contrary to a traditional degree programme the choice of the learning, teaching and assessment approaches to apply, starts with the programme learning outcomes to be achieved. These decide the mix of teaching techniques, learning activities and related modes of assessment. Since alignment is a prerequisite, the first question that comes up, is how the set of competences phrased as learning outcomes can be measured. While it is not too difficult to assess knowledge, this is different for the higher levels of learning as identified by Bloom and others, such as analysing, evaluating and creating. They require an active role of the learner in the learning process and other – more sophisticated – evaluation techniques than written and oral examinations. This explains the term ‘active learning’ introduced earlier in this chapter – the opposite of passive learning – which includes many different concepts of learning. To list but a few of these: ‘problem-based learning’, ‘research-based learning’, ‘experience-based-learning’,

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<sup>608</sup> The model was published in Jenneke Lokhoff et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*, Annex 1, 59-62. The model was prepared by Ann Katharine Isaacs and the author of this book.

<sup>609</sup> The concept of ‘constructive alignment’ was introduced by John Biggs in 1999. See: John Biggs and Catherine Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 3rd. Ed. Maidenhead, 2007. The authors claim in the preface of this edition that the concept ‘has become part of the working theory not only of individual teachers, researchers and teaching developers, but has been implemented in many institutions and is now part of the language of quality assurance on a systematic basis’. This might be mainly true for the Anglo-Saxon world.

‘design learning’, ‘peer learning’, ‘cooperative learning’, ‘discovery learning’, ‘inquiry-based learning’, ‘learning by teaching’, ‘work-based learning’, ‘experiential learning’ and ‘blended learning’. They all have their own ‘theoretical frameworks’ and advocates. It is up to the university/ faculty/ department to make a final choice. Given the overlap between these concepts of learning, a combination is also possible. However, to keep it simple we might refer to the concept of ‘active’ learning only.

More important in our context is the choice to be made with regard to the teaching techniques or methods. Besides the traditional lecture and seminar (small group teaching) – which is differently understood in different contexts – a selection can be presented here, which is only by no means complete and meant to be indicative only: tutorial, research seminar, exercise class, workshop, practical class, problem-solving session, laboratory teaching, demonstration class, placement/ work-based practice (internship/ traineeship/ entrepreneurship), fieldwork, flipped-classroom, MOOC.<sup>610</sup> Ideally, each study programme contains a mixture of these techniques, fitting best to the learning outcomes to be met.

It is no different for the educational or learning activities. Learning activities are aligned with both the modes of assessment and the teaching techniques. To name but a few: conduct searches, literature survey, summarizing reading, posing and solving problems, conduct research, practice technical and laboratory skills, practice professional skills, peer reviewing, teamwork and project work, role-play, chairing and participating in meetings, perform under pressure/ time constraint, etc.

And finally possible forms of assessment to apply: reports, tests, written assignments, case study, oral examination, literature reviews, presentations, posters, data analyses, performance of (practical) skills, portfolios, critique of contrasting research papers, bibliography, commentary, blog, research plan, research presentation, outline, open book examination, multiple choice questions, commentary, creative project, programming project, composition.<sup>611</sup> The overview offers an indication that tailored assessment forms have been developed to assess most (if not all) types of generic and subject specific competences. With regard to types of assessment, a distinction is made between formative assessment (based on the format of regular feedback as part of the learning process) including continuous assessment (measuring progress of performance in a course unit) and summative assessment. In a student-centred model the assessment

<sup>610</sup> See for a long list of 150 teaching methods: The Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Carolina, Charlotte August. Retrieved 2 June 2016 from: <http://teaching.uncc.edu/learning-resources/articles-books/best-practice/instructional-methods/150-teaching-methods>

<sup>611</sup> University of Sussex, Modes of Assessment 2016-2017. Retrieved 7 August 2016 from: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/examsandassessment>

should be transparent and criteria-based. That is why often use is made of rubrics.<sup>612</sup>

For the complete team of teachers responsible for delivering the programme and achieving the intended learning outcomes, it is essential that clear arrangements are made, about *who* is responsible for *what*. In other words, there has to be agreement in the team which consistent mixture of teaching techniques/ learning activities/ modes of assessment is applied for every course unit. This is to avoid unnecessary repetitions and to guarantee that progress in learning is achieved, respecting the available student workload. Referred is again to image 7 *Model for the planning and evaluation of student workload* presented above. By completing this model for every course unit and comparing its content to all others in the same programme, feasible and consistent learning strings can be developed. Also the image 5 of the cake, the *Tuning comprehensive degree programme model*, comes to mind: teachers bear responsibility for different slices of the same cake.

To be informed what colleagues are doing in their class and to guarantee unit and overall consistency, but also to be transparent towards students, it is a necessity that for each course unit a course syllabus is prepared. This syllabus, should contain, besides basic information such as the name of the course unit, the number of ECTS-credits and the (weekly) programme, – at least – the list of competences to be developed, the overview of intended learning outcomes, and the learning activities, teaching techniques and the modes of assessment. If appropriate, it should also be indicated how the particular course unit is related to others, for example by naming the prerequisites for the unit. Well-structured course syllabi have proved to be the backbone of a student-centred degree programme. They also have shown to be a good instrument for quality assurance. A Tuning model of such a syllabus is attached as annex 4 to this chapter.

## In conclusion

The reform of higher education programmes and their course units require serious effort and an informed staff. Nearly twenty years into the Bologna Process has shown us that implementing system changes is one thing, but the modernisation of the educational process is quite another. The latter has proven to be a very serious challenge in most if not all European countries.

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<sup>612</sup> The term *rubric* refers to a scoring guide used to evaluate the quality of students' constructed responses. Rubrics usually contain evaluative criteria, quality definitions for those criteria at particular levels of achievement, and a scoring strategy. See for example: D. Stevens and A.J. Levi, *Introduction to Rubrics. An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning*, Sterling, VA. 2013.

Being a challenge does not mean that it should not be met. Today's higher education institutions and their staff are expected to operate in the middle of society. This means they can no longer limit themselves to knowledge acquisition and transfer. They are expected to make their graduates not only knowledgeable but also skilled-, meaning that they can actually apply that knowledge in the work place and society at large. To achieve this aim the paradigm of expert-driven education does suit no longer and has to be replaced by the student-centred approach.

While in the 'old paradigm' staff training and development seemed not to be essential, this is quite different for the 'new' one. To operate successfully in modern education, teachers in academia need a toolbox. This toolbox contains knowledge about the concepts and methods outlined above. It also contains the skills and competences to apply this theoretical knowledge in practice. This implies that every university teacher should indeed – as subscribed in the Dutch model described above – be able to design and redesign a course unit in the wider context of the degree programme, be able to offer academic teaching and student supervision according to the new paradigm, be able to use a wide range of appropriate testing and assessment methodologies to measure performance and finally have the competences to allow for the critical evaluation of class performance and his/her own performance.

Designing and delivering course units is no longer depending on individual performances only but also requires teamwork and coordination. But most of all, it requires a dialogue between experts in the field, who do not operate in an ivory tower but in the wider world, and who are aware what society expects from their graduates. Given the present situation in most of the higher education institutions and departments in Europe this means that serious steps still have to be made to make the identified necessary reforms a reality. This requires an effort from all decision and implementation levels: national (budget), institutional (structure), departmental (commitment) and individual (cooperation). As in the case of the educational process 'alignment' is the buzz word.

Tuning has developed an approach which should support individual departments and members of staff to make the necessary changes. It starts from the assumption that every degree programme has a unique profile, which suits an identified role – its mission – to make students knowledgeable and skilled for employment at local, regional, national and/or international level. It also should accommodate civic, social and cultural engagement to underpin a sustainable society. Every academic and member of the supporting staff should feel ownership of the profile, which should be the outcome of a debate involving stakeholders from inside and outside of the higher education institution. In the Tuning philosophy an integral part of the degree profile features are the (cycle) level

descriptors which are defined as key or core competences. Each programme is expected to give its own twist to the descriptors developed at European, national, sectoral and subject area level. This results in programme learning outcomes which are broken down in module and/or unit learning outcomes.

The module and/or unit learning outcomes should be feasible in terms of realistic student-workload. As has been shown in this chapter Tuning has developed a range of tools to develop, implement and enhance degree programmes which meet the needs of society, requiring active learning of students, based on the concept of student-centred learning. It has defined – together with credential evaluators and accreditors a degree profile template based on seven entries when consistently applied will facilitate transparency. Furthermore, it has introduced at European – later global level – consistent terminology for educational reform by introducing the terms competence and learning outcomes and explaining their relationship. These form the basis for a further contribution, that is an approach to construct, implement and enhance degree programmes according to the student-centred approach. This has resulted in a ten-steps approach.

Taking into account the many taxonomies that have been defined since 1956, Tuning has developed its own model to formulate learning outcomes at programme and module/ unit level. This model is unique, because it surpasses the axiom that the level of learning can be identified by using the most appropriate ‘verb’. Operating in an international setting – being confronted with the different connotations of terms when translated, and taking into account most recent developments, it has concluded that a verifiable, comprehensible and observable learning outcome requires specificity, objectivity, achievability, usefulness, relevance and standard-setting. This implies a structure containing four other indicators besides the active verb: type, topic, standard or level and scope and/or context. To assure a fair student workload Tuning has developed an approach to estimate, evaluate and adjust student workload. Learning outcomes and student workload form the core of a Tuning model for a course unit syllabus. This range of tools should help developing a quality culture within a higher education institution and should also guarantee that degree programmes on offer are relevant and of an appropriate level. However, a quality culture and the outlined set of instruments or toolbox will only be effective and used with confidence when the individual teacher feels ownership. As has been indicated, this is still not yet the case.

## **Annex 1: Ten-steps for designing new programmes (or improving existing ones)**

### **1. *Determine need and potential***

- Consult stakeholders (potential students, academics, potential employers) to verify that the degree is needed.
- Decide whether the programme proposed satisfies established or new professional and/or social demands.

### **2. *Define the profile and the key competences***

- Identify the main discipline(s)/ subject area(s) which form the basis of the degree programme
- Specify whether the focus of the degree programme is to be general and/or specialist.
- Decide on the orientation of the degree programme.
- Identify and describe the potential fields/ sectors where its graduates may find employment.
- Identify and describe its contribution to developing citizenship and personal culture.
- Identify the Key Programme Competences, making if possible a distinction between generic and subject specific competences, most relevant for the degree programme proposed (up to 15).
- Formulate these key generic and subject specific competence in greater detail by making use of the instructions included in this guide

### **3. *Formulate the Programme Learning Outcomes***

- Formulate the Programme Learning Outcomes related to the Key Programme Competences identified (up to 15 to 20) by making use of the Tuning guidelines.

### **4. *Decide whether to 'modularise' or not***

- Decide whether each course unit should carry a set number (e.g. 5 or its multiples) or carry a random number based on the workload foreseen.
- Allocate ECTS credits to each course unit, based on the convention that a semester carries 30 ECTS credits and a normal academic year 60 ECTS credits and the recommendation that one ECTS credit corresponds to 25-30 hours of student workload.



**5. *Identify competences and formulate learning outcomes for each module***

- Select the generic and subject specific competences to be formed or enhanced in each module on the basis of the Key Programme Competences identified under step 3.
- Formulate the learning outcomes for each competence to be developed in the course unit.

**6. *Determine the approaches to teaching, learning and assessment***

- Decide how the competences can best be (further) developed and assessed, to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
- Foresee a variety of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment.

**7. *Check whether the key generic and subject specific competences are covered***

- Check progression paths of the key generic and subject specific competences identified.
- Check whether all programme key generic and subject specific competences are covered by the modules/course units.

**8. *Describe the programme and the course units***

- Prepare a programme description and course unit descriptions on the basis of the profile, key Programme Competences, Programme Learning Outcomes, allocation of credits and the teaching, learning and assessment approaches identified.

**9. *Check balance and feasibility***

- Check whether the completed programme is balanced in terms of the effort it requires and the competences to be achieved.
- Check whether the credits have been allocated on sound principles and that the students can complete the individual units and the whole programme within the allotted time,

**10. *Implement, monitor and improve***

- Implement the degree programme and its components according to a clear structure and transparent implementation plan.
- Monitor the degree programme and its components by making use of both student and staff questionnaires to evaluate teaching, learning and assessment, as well as output information in terms of success rates.
- Use a feed-back and feed-forward system to analyse the outcomes of the evaluations and expected developments in the field with respect to society as well as to academia.
- Use the information collected to enhance the degree programme and its components.

## Annex 2: TUNING List of Key Questions for Programme Design and Programme Delivery, Maintenance and Evaluation in the Framework of the Bologna Reform

### Programme design

<i>Items</i>	<i>Key questions</i>
Degree profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the need for and the potential of the (new) degree programme been established comprehensively fully and clearly?</li> <li>• Does it aim to satisfy established or new professional and/or social demands?</li> <li>• Was there a consultation with stakeholders? Did they identify the need for the degree programme?</li> <li>• Was the approach used for the consultation adequate? Were the groups selected the relevant ones for the degree programme considered?</li> <li>• Are the definition of the profile, the identification of the target groups to be addressed and its place in the national and international setting clear?</li> <li>• Is there convincing evidence that the profile will be recognized in terms of future employment? Is it related to a specific professional or social context?</li> <li>• Is this profile academically challenging for staff and students?</li> <li>• Is there awareness of the educational context in which the programme is offered?</li> </ul>
Learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have clear and adequate learning outcomes been identified at the level of the programme as a whole and of each of its components?</li> <li>• Will they result in the profile identified? Are they adequately distributed over the various parts of the programme?</li> <li>• Is the progression and coherence of the programme and its units sufficiently guaranteed?</li> <li>• Are the learning outcomes formulated in terms of subject specific and generic competences covering knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities and values?</li> <li>• What guarantee is there that the learning outcomes will be recognized and understood within and outside Europe?</li> </ul>

Competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the competences to be obtained by the student clearly identified and formulated, both subject specific and generic?</li> <li>• Is the level of the competences to be obtained appropriate for this specific degree programme?</li> <li>• Are the competences to be gained expressed in such a way that they can actually be measured?</li> <li>• Is progression guaranteed in the development of the competences?</li> <li>• Can the competences obtained be assessed adequately? Is the methodology of assessment of the competences clearly specified and suitable for the expressed learning outcomes?</li> <li>• Are the approaches chosen for learning and teaching the competences clearly specified? What evidence is there to assure that the results will be reached?</li> <li>• Are the approaches chosen sufficiently varied and innovative/ creative?</li> <li>• Are the competences identified comparable and compatible with the European reference points relative to the subject area? (if applicable)</li> </ul>
Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the entrance level of potential students been taken into consideration when identifying their learning needs?</li> <li>• Does the level of learning outcomes and competences correspond to the level(s) of the degree (cycle) foreseen in the European and National Qualification Framework?</li> <li>• If sublevels are included, are these described in terms of learning outcomes expressed in competences?</li> <li>• Are levels described in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– acquiring knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities</li> <li>– applying knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities in practice</li> <li>– making informed judgments and choices</li> <li>– communicating knowledge and understanding</li> <li>– capacities to continue learning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Credits and Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the degree programme ECTS based? Is it in alignment with the ECTS key features?</li> <li>• Have credits been allocated to the programme? How is the adequacy of this allocation guaranteed?</li> <li>• How are credits related to the learning outcomes of this programme?</li> <li>• How is the correlation between workload and credit allocation checked?</li> <li>• How is a balanced student workload guaranteed during each learning period in terms of learning, teaching and assessment activities?</li> <li>• What mechanisms are used for revision of credit allocation and learning, teaching and assessment activities? How are the students involved in this process?</li> <li>• Is information on the programme (modules and/or course units) presented as described in the ECTS Users' Guide?</li> <li>• How is student mobility facilitated in the programme?</li> <li>• How are students advised about mobility?</li> <li>• How are the key documents of ECTS used for mobility?</li> <li>• Who is responsible for recognition and which are the procedures used?</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the formal acceptance of the programme and the resources required to deliver it, guaranteed?</li> <li>• Is the staffing (academic and supporting staff and workplace supervisors) for delivering the programme guaranteed? Does the programme require the use of teaching staff from outside the department/institution?</li> <li>• Is staff development foreseen in terms of (new) approaches to learning, teaching and assessment?</li> <li>• How are the necessary structural, financial and technical means (class rooms, equipment, health and safety procedures etc.) guaranteed?</li> <li>• In the case of workplace learning/placements, are there sufficient and suitable placements guaranteed?</li> </ul>

## Programme delivery, maintenance and evaluation

Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the quality of delivery of the programme and its components monitored?</li> <li>• How is staff quality and motivation for the delivery of the programme monitored?</li> <li>• Are there systems in place to evaluate the quality of the learning environment in workplace learning/ placements?</li> <li>• Is the quality of class rooms and the equipment (including workplace environments) required to deliver the programme sufficient?</li> <li>• How is the entrance level of potential students monitored?</li> <li>• How is student performance monitored in terms of quality of learning outcomes to be obtained/ competences to be achieved and time required to complete the programme and its components?</li> <li>• In what way is the employability of graduates monitored?</li> <li>• How is the alumni database organized?</li> <li>• Are data collected on the graduates' satisfaction with the programme?</li> </ul>
Updating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the system for updating/ revision of the degree programme organized?</li> <li>• In what way can changes related to external developments in society be incorporated in the programme?</li> <li>• How is staff development related to programme updating organized and guaranteed?</li> </ul>
Sustainability and responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the sustainability of the programme guaranteed?</li> <li>• How is it guaranteed that the relevant bodies take responsibility for sustaining and updating of the programme?</li> </ul>

Organisation and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How is the updating of information regarding the degree programme organized and guaranteed?</li><li>• How is the adequacy of the system of student support, advising and tutoring ensured?</li><li>• Is a Diploma Supplement issued to the students automatically and without charge in a widely spoken European language?</li></ul>
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### Annex 3: TUNING Checklist for Curriculum Evaluation

The following elements can be distinguished within the framework of curriculum evaluation: the educational process, the educational outcome and the means and facilities required for programme delivery.

#### Educational Process:

- degree profile (aims educational programme)
- learning outcomes and competences to be achieved
- degree/educational programme build-up and order of programme components (to realize progression)
- coherence of degree/ educational programme
- division of workload over the semester and academic year
- feasibility of programme
- teaching, learning and assessment methods
- connection of secondary and higher education
- international cooperation and student mobility

#### Educational product/ outcome:

- study rate, cessation of study and switch-overs (output)
- output of 1st and 2nd cycle
- employability

#### Means and facilities required:

- structural and technical facilities
- staff and material means
- student support: student counsellors

### EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

#### 1. Degree/ programme profile

##### *Premises:*

The degree programme has a clearly defined profile which is based on the demands set by an academic degree on the one hand, and by the needs of society on the other hand by taking the future labour-market of graduates (of that particular programme) into consideration.

##### *Questions:*

To what extent do the available data show that the programme profile meets the demands set to it? If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

## 2. Learning outcomes and competences at programme level

### *Premises:*

The degree programme has clearly defined learning outcomes that reflect the programme profile. The learning outcomes are described in terms of competences to be attained by the students (knowledge, understanding and skills).

### *Questions:*

To what extent do the learning outcomes and competences to be attained by the students correspond with the programme profile? If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

## 3. Learning outcomes and competences of the (separate) programme components

### *Premises:*

For each degree programme component a total of about five learning outcomes has been formulated, which clearly contribute to realizing the learning outcomes at programme level. The learning outcomes are described in terms of competences to be attained (knowledge, understanding and skills)

### *Questions:*

Are the learning outcomes (explicitly) mentioned in the course syllabus of each programme component (module or course unit), and explained further when required? To what extent is it clear from the descriptions that specific competences are practised? Is indicated which level of the competences is aimed for.

## 4. Curriculum set-up and the sequence of programme components/ educational modules

### *Premises:*

The curriculum is structured in such a way that coherence is assured within the total programme, in the various phases of the programme, and the separate programme components, and continuous progression is made with regard to the generic and subject specific competences that have to be attained in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills.

### *Questions:*

To what extent is it clear in practice that the programme is structured in such a way that coherence is assured and that progression is made with regard to knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to the learning outcomes and competences to be attained? If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

## 5. (Division of) workload

### *Premises:*

The programme is structured in such a way that a well-balanced division of the total workload is realized for the programme as a whole, for and within the



separate academic years, and for and within both semesters. The calculated workload per programme component must correspond with the time that a typical student needs to attain the required learning outcomes.

*Questions:*

To what extent is it shown in practice that the total workload is divided according to the premises in the above? If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

6. Feasibility of degree programme

*Premises:*

The programme is set up in such a way that it is feasible for a typical student (to complete the programme within the given time frame). This implies a good mixture of teaching, learning and assessment methods, no unnecessary impediments between programme components, and sufficient supervision/tutoring by the teaching staff.

*Questions:*

To what extent are guaranteed that a well-balanced combination of teaching and learning and assessment methods is applied, sufficient supervision by teaching staff is available, and entrance requirements for programme components are only required when a motivation with regard to educational content can be given? If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

7. Teaching, learning and assessment methods

*Premises:*

The teaching, learning and assessment methods used are varied and have been chosen because they are particularly well-suited to achieving the formulated learning outcomes and competences.

*Questions:*

To what extent does the available information, in particular the educational and assessment regulations and course syllabi, assure that the formulated premises are being met? If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

8. Connection of secondary and higher education

*Premises:*

The programme has been set up so that it takes into consideration the entrance level of students. For first cycle programmes it concerns the connection to secondary education, and for second cycle programmes it concerns the connection to first cycle programmes (that give entrance to the second cycle programmes).

*Questions:*

To what extent is made certain that the programme is set up in such a way that a good transition is provided with regard to entrance qualifications for

first and second cycle? If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

#### 9. International cooperation

##### *Premises:*

There is structural cooperation with foreign partner institutions. This cooperation can be joint degree programmes and/or facilitating student exchanges and recognizing the academic achievements undertaken at the partner institutions.

##### *Questions:*

In what way is it guaranteed that students do not get behind schedule if they take part of their programme at a foreign partner institution, except when they are responsible for it themselves (e.g. because they have changed their programme without consultation, or because they have not completed programme components successfully). If necessary, which adjustments are thought to be desirable?

### EDUCATIONAL PRODUCT

#### 10. (Realized) output of 1st or 2nd cycle

##### *Premises:*

The Faculty/School aims to achieve the following aims: successful completion of the first year of study xx% (maximum two years after starting the programme), completion of a first cycle degree based on a completed first year xx% (four years after starting the educational programme), completion of a second cycle degree xx% (two or three years after starting the educational programme).

##### *Questions:*

Does the programme realize the set percentages? If not, why? Which suggestions are made in that case to bring about improvement?

#### 11. Employability

##### *Premises:*

The degree programme meets a need in society as can be concluded from the fact that the transition to the labour market in a broad sense is good.

##### *Question:*

Do graduates find (suitable) employment within a reasonable period of time that fits the profile and level of the degree programme?

## REQUIRED FACILITIES AND MEANS

### 12. Structural and technical facilities

*Premises:*

Sufficient structural and technical facilities and provisions are available for the delivery of the degree programme.

*Question:*

Are any bottlenecks apparent in practice in the delivery of the programme with regard to facilities and provisions?

### 13. Material and personnel means

*Premises:*

For the delivery of the programme sufficient quantitative and qualitative personnel means are made available in terms of teaching and supporting (administrative and technical) staff. Each programme/ organizational unit has sufficient means for the delivery of the programme (guest lecturers, materials etc.)

*Question:*

To what extent are the assigned means sufficient in practice to deliver the programme according to its original premises and set-up?

### 14. Student support, advising and tutoring

*Premises:*

A system for student support, student advising and tutoring is available to students.

*Question:*

In what way is the demand/need met for an adequate system of student support, advising and tutoring?

## Annex 4: Tuning Course Unit Syllabus model



### TUNING MODEL COURSE UNIT SYLLABUS

o. **Exam and resit dates:**  
 ..... (Actual dates or reference to designated website)

1. **Title:** ..... (to be completed)  
**Course unit code:** ..... (see Course Catalogue)  
**Degree programme:** ..... (to be completed)  
**Study phase:** First year/ Bachelor's phase/ Master's phase  
**Course unit type:** Major/ Minor/ Elective/ etc.  
**Lecturer(s):** ..... (to be completed)

2. **Number of ECTS credit points:**  
*For example:*  
 Total xx ECTS credits  
 Lectures x ECTS credits  
 Tutorial x ECTS credits

3. **Entry requirements**  
 ..... (to be completed)

*For example:*  
 Completed first year or specific course units (in accordance with the Teaching and Examination Regulation)

4. **Description of content**  
 ..... (to be completed)

*Explanatory note:*  
 Describe the theme or topic that is dealt with or discussed in the course unit.

## 5. Literature

..... (to be completed)

### *Explanatory note:*

Provide an overview of the literature that will be used or studied during the course unit (syllabus, articles, reviews, monographs, etc.). Make a distinction between compulsory literature and recommended reading if necessary. Also indicate whether information can be found on Blackboard or another digital learning environment.

## 6. Key competences phrased as Programme learning outcomes to be developed

This course unit contributes to the development of the following programme learning outcomes, which are based on the key competences as stated in the degree profile:

1. .... (to be completed)

2. ....

3. ....

4. ....

5. ....

6. ....

### *Explanatory note:*

Order to take into account: Degree programme profile – Key competences – Programme learning outcomes – Module/ Unit learning outcomes

Competences can be divided into *subject specific* and *generic* competences. They refer to specific knowledge areas, subject specific skills and general academic skills, including the ability to abstract, analyse and synthesize information, academic writing skills, oral presentation skills, research skills, IT skills, etc.

Normally, a maximum of 5 to 6 competences should be included. They cover competences that are explicitly addressed in this course unit.

*The departmental board or a comparable designated entity is responsible for selecting the competences to be developed in each course unit to guarantee that all identified competences are developed as part of the programme.*

## 7. Learning outcomes of the course unit

This course unit focuses on the development of the following learning outcomes, contributing to the achievement of the programme learning outcomes:

1. .... (to be completed)

2. ....

3. ....

4. ....

5. ....

6. ....

*Explanatory note:*

Learning outcomes at course unit level are core descriptions of what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do after completing the course unit, formulated in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills acquired. When formulating the learning outcomes, attention must be paid to the level of the course unit, the practical skills that are practised during class and the position of the course unit in the degree programme. The learning outcomes of a course unit translate the degree programme's learning outcomes to the level of an individual course unit. Learning outcomes at course unit level are formulated as competences to be developed. They involve five indicators: *active verb, type, topic, standard or level and scope and/or context*.

*The learning outcomes for a course unit, formulated in terms of competences that students must acquire, are formulated by the departmental board or a comparable entity.*

Example of a learning outcome:

*The student is demonstrably able to give an oral presentation comprising a clearly formulated question, an unambiguous argument and a relevant conclusion about a limited topic, based on the study and analysis of a variety of opinions found in secondary literature.*

## 8. Position of the course unit in the degree programme

..... (to be completed)

*Explanatory note:*

It is often useful to indicate how a certain course unit is connected to other course units in the degree programme. Is it a continuation of previous course units and/or an introduction to a future one? Is the unit part of a (progressive) learning string?

## 9. Assessment method(s) and assessment procedure

..... (to be completed)

*Explanatory note:*

This section must provide concrete information about the assessment methods used and the moments when assessments are held. The latter is important, for example, if continuous assessment is used. If a system with compensation options is applied, this should also be stated here. Information about the relative importance of various activities expressed in 'weight' within the framework of a set of tutorials, for example, may also be included here.

An example of a set of *assessment activities* to be assessed in a course unit:

<i>Component</i>	<i>Weight</i>
– exam on the basis of introductory literature (at the start of the course unit)	4
– presentation and/or paper	10
– defending one's own written or oral contribution	1
– active participation in discussions	1
– providing well-argued feedback on the written assignments of other students in the group	2
– chairmanship of a meetin/ debate	1
– co-assessor ship resulting a presentation	1

### 10. Assessment requirements and criteria

..... (to be completed)

#### *Explanatory note:*

The requirements for the assessment of student performance should be transparent from the start of the course unit. Any attendance requirements have to be clearly stated. For example: attendance at 80% of all lectures/sessions is required. It is recommended that attendance requirements are justified with arguments. Another example of an assessment requirement is when in the event of insufficient participation or insufficient fulfilment of assignments, the student is excluded from taking the concluding exam.

Also the assessment criteria applied should be made transparent by including these in the course unit syllabus. Examples of these criteria include:

- the presentation/ written assignment of about xx pages has to be based on a wide variety of primary and/or secondary sources with a total volume of at least xxx pages of literature studied (depending on the type of discipline). The written assignment or presentation will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:
  - structure and clarity of the argument (consistency of introduction, argument and conclusion)
  - analytical (and synthesizing) skills with regard to the material consulted
  - originality
  - correct spelling and sentence structure as well as stylistic skills
  - independence in searching and processing literature
  - use of secondary and, if relevant, primary sources
  - correct and careful processing of literature (annotation and justification)
- the written assignment consists of a well-argued analysis of visual material on the basis of demonstrable knowledge and understanding of relevant secondary literature

- the written assignment comprises the results of a small-scale research project in which use has been made of a relevant research method (e.g. a survey), the choice of which has been clearly argued on the basis of demonstrable knowledge and understanding of the secondary literature
- the mark for the written assignment accounts for 50% of the final mark
- a written or oral examination based on the compulsory literature indicated
- the combined marks for the written assignment and the (written or oral) exam must be a pass mark or higher.

### 11. Learning and teaching strategies or methods

..... (to be completed)

#### *Explanatory notes:*

Relevant (effective) learning strategies or methods should be chosen (e.g. team work, individual (written and/or oral) assignments, blended learning, project work) in order to develop (or further develop) the competences, phrased as programme learning outcomes, listed under 6 and to meet the intended learning outcomes listed under 7. The competences/ learning outcomes must allow for formative and/or summative testing/ assessment. Assessment and learning/ teaching methods are inextricably linked and should be aligned.

### 12. Weekly programme

..... (to be completed)

#### *Explanatory note:*

A weekly overview is provided of the planned learning and teaching activities, the topics to be discussed, material to be studied, assignments to be prepared, presentations to be held, mid-term tests, to be taken, etc.

Example of a weekly programme:

Week 1: Introduction, allocation of topics for (written) student assignment(s)

Week 2:

Week 3:

Etc.

### 13. Breakdown of workload

..... (to be completed)

#### *Explanatory note:*

This syllabus should contain a precise breakdown of the workload on the basis of the available credit points. The breakdown can be based on the following factors: the number of contact hours, work to be done before and after class sessions, various tasks (commenting on other students' contributions, preparing and writing papers/assignments, preparing oral presentations, etc.), independent study (reading and studying literature, preparing exams), etc.



Check the document 'Calculation of average workload' included as an annex to this model to determine the amount of literature that can be studied for the course unit.

#### 14. Availability of lecturer(s)

..... (to be completed)

*Explanatory note:*

Include the following basic information about the lecturers(s) for the course unit: e-mail address, telephone number, room number, office hours, etc.

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## CALCULATION OF AVERAGE WORKLOAD

### Introductory remarks

*Below is a calculation example for determining the workload of modules. This example is based on a number of assumptions, which may vary from programme to programme. The relevant department or responsible lecturer will assess these matters. The calculation method must always be transparent.*

### Principles

- First-year students may be expected to be able to read 4 to 5 pages of a typical text book or monograph per hour and to reproduce the content in an oral or written exam or a written assignment.
- Senior students may be expected to be able to read 6 to 7 pages of a typical text book or monograph per hour and to reproduce the content in an oral or written exam or a written assignment.
- One ECTS credit is the equivalent of 25-30 hours of study.
- Two study hours must be counted for each one-hour lecture or tutorial; the second hour is spent preparing the class and/or studying the material discussed.
- Each written page of a written assignment or thesis must be based on 100 pages of literature (standard monographs and academic articles), depending on the nature of the material and the discipline. Students must therefore have read 1500-2100 pages in order to write a 15 to 20-page paper, which equals 10 ECTS credits (250-300 hours times x 6-7 pages per hour). 'Reading' includes finding material, studying the material, writing a draft text and revising this text.

## Calculation example

A planned tutorial module comprises 10 ECTS credits (250-300 hours).

The following activities can be included:

- Third-year tutorial: 2 hours per week for 14 weeks, including reading and commenting on assignments written by group members (critical reflection) (2 hours per week x 14 weeks for participation plus 2 hours per week x 14 weeks for preparation = 2 ECTS credit (2x28 hours))
- Studying a textbook and sitting an exam. The exam will be based on 500 textbook pages (at 6 pages per hour this adds up to 83 hours = 3 ECTS credits)
- Writing a 7 to 10-page paper (for which 850 to 1000 pages of literature must be read, which adds up to about 140 hours = 5 ECTS credits)

Total:  $2 + 3 + 5 = 10$  ECTS credits.

## 8. A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the Implementation of the Learning-Outcomes Based Approach in the European Union<sup>613</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*Higher education institutions have, in the framework of the Bologna Process, been called to re-define their degree programmes on the basis of the learning outcomes approach. This implies a change of paradigm moving from teacher-centred to student-centred education. The Tuning project was set-up in 2000 to develop – through a bottom-up approach – a methodology to achieve this shift. This methodology proved not only to be relevant for Europe, but also for other world regions, including the USA, where Tuning projects were launched from 2009. In 2010 both in the European Union and the USA the need was felt to find out whether the intended modernisation of learning was actually taking place and how this process was perceived by its main stakeholders. For this purpose a study was initiated, covering the period 2011 to the beginning of 2016, based on the two-pillar approach of quantitative and qualitative instruments. For the study a robust evaluation instrument was developed, consisting of surveys and in-depth interviews implemented by a research team at a selected group of higher education institutions, involving management, teaching staff, student counsellors and students. In this chapter the outcomes of the EU part of the study are presented, cross referencing to some of the USA study results. The main outcome of the study is that in general limited progress has been made regarding the intended paradigm shift and that key expectations of the reform Process have not been met. This is both the case for Europe and the USA. Although good practices have been identified, the actual implementation of the student-centred approach is not proceeding beyond a discourse on the paradigm shift and there is no certainty it will be achieved. For Europe there is also a worrying disconnect between the various tiers of the higher education sector, ranging from Ministers to students, regarding the actual penetration of the student-centred*

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<sup>613</sup> This chapter is a revision of an article published earlier to make it fit for this book. The authors of that article are in alphabetic order: Tim Birtwistle, Courtney Brown and Robert Wagenaar. The paper was published with the same title in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*, Vol.3, No. 2, May 2016; The paper was the outcome of a study commissioned by the European Commission and the Lumina Foundation and resulted for the EU part in the following report: Tim Birtwistle and Robert Wagenaar, *A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU and the USA*. Groningen, 2016.

The research team of the EU part of the study consisted of the authors and the following researchers: Ingrid van der Meer (International Tuning Academy Groningen), Eurne Bartolomé Peral (International Tuning Academy Bilbao) and Anna Serbati (University of Padova). Robert Wagenaar was the formal project leader and co-ordinator of the study.

*approach and the education experience of the students. There has been a failure to engage with and convince academic staff about the necessity and advantages of this paradigm shift. Teaching staff are struggling to adjust to the new concepts and paradigm shift and are challenged by no longer being the “knowledge owners” but rather learning facilitators. It does not help that the vast majority of staff members have not undertaken professional development for higher education teaching. Where staff development has taken place, it is too focused on process, rather than on the concepts and benefits of a learning outcomes approach. The outcomes of the study should therefore be perceived as a wake-up call because without additional and continued support in particular for the teaching staff the reform process could fail.*

## Introduction

It was in preparing the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial conference that it was decided that the focus of the Bologna Process should be channelled to the learning process and related paradigm change of student-centred learning, having put emphasis on system change in the previous decade. This meant in practice fully accepting the Tuning agenda. During the years Tuning had contributed to the development and enhancement of high-quality competitive study programmes by focussing on fitness of purpose (to meet expectations) and fitness for purpose (to meet aims) as well as providing a “living” assessment and pedagogical learning environment that is applicable to the “4ever” learners: whoever they may be, wherever they may be, however they learn, whenever they learn. This Tuning methodology transcends “delivery” and encompasses all learners.

Since 2003 the Tuning methodology spread gradually around the globe in varying degrees and with a local context often put on the core principles. In the case of Tuning Latin America it covered 18 countries and 15 subject areas, for Tuning USA it was sometimes a single state within the country and always a single language<sup>614</sup>, whilst in China, Georgia and Russia it was in a single language in a single country<sup>615</sup>. However, although the Tuning approach spread around Europe and the world, it must be stated at the outset that the term Tuning is not universally recognised. It meets strong ‘brand loyalty’ from those who have been engaged in projects around the globe<sup>616</sup> but beyond that recognition is limited, in particular to higher education management. To that end throughout this chapter the term Tuning encompasses the student-centred approach (requiring a learning outcomes approach). Indeed it was Tuning that raised awareness about

<sup>614</sup> For example see: MHEC website: <http://www.mhec.org/programs/tuning>

<sup>615</sup> See: Tuning Russia website: <http://www.tuningrussia.org/index.php?lang=ru>

<sup>616</sup> See: Tuning Educational Structures in Europe website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/> for details

the need for a paradigm shift from staff driven to student-centred higher education.<sup>617</sup>

The study, that provides the basis for this chapter, originates from the co-operation between the International Tuning Academy experts from Europe and *Lumina Foundation*<sup>618</sup>. The private *Lumina Foundation* has at its core “Goal 20%25”, which aim it is to have 60% of Americans with high-quality degrees (by 2025). Lumina funding has covered a number of analytical tracts of the Bologna Process<sup>619</sup>, that is the studies of Cliff Adelman and Paul L. Gaston, and projects as part of the Tuning USA initiative as well as discussion working documents.<sup>620</sup> The development of Tuning USA (2008) involved higher education institutions in three US states covering six disciplines with a mix of two-year, four-year, public and private institutions. The initial pilot project was completed in August 2010. Tuning USA 2 was launched in early 2012 with more states and disciplines as well as taking the subject area of history deeper and wider with the American Historical Association (AHA).<sup>621</sup> The involvement in Tuning also led to the development of an overarching US Qualifications Framework in 2011, which was named Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP).<sup>622</sup> It was prepared by an informed team of four authors.<sup>623</sup> In the DQP document credit is offered to the work of Tuning. There is close alignment. The extensive range of projects funded by

<sup>617</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Final Report, 2003 and Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao, Groningen: Universities of Deusto and Groningen, 2005.

<sup>618</sup> See: [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org)

<sup>619</sup> Cliff Adelman, *The Bologna Process for U.S. Eyes: Re-learning Higher Education in the Age of Convergence*. Washington, 2009; Paul L. Gaston, *The Challenge of Bologna. What the United States Higher Education Has to Learn From Europe, and Why It Matters That We Learn It*. Sterling: Stylus Publishing, 2010. Both authors draw attention to the Tuning initiative.

<sup>620</sup> Holiday Hart McKiernan and Tim Birtwistle, Making the Implicit Explicit: Demonstrating the Value Added of Higher Education by a Qualifications Framework, in: *The Journal of College and University Law*. Notre Dame, 2010: [http://www3.nd.edu/~jcul/files/Birtwistle\\_McKiernan.pdf](http://www3.nd.edu/~jcul/files/Birtwistle_McKiernan.pdf)

<sup>621</sup> AHA History Tuning Project: 2013 History Discipline Core. Retrieved on 25 July 2018 from: <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2013-history-discipline-core>; AHA History Tuning Project: 2016 History Discipline Core. Retrieved on 25 July 2018 from: <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core>

<sup>622</sup> Lumina Foundation, *The Degree Qualifications Profile. A learning-centered framework for what college graduates should know and be able to do to earn the associate, bachelor's or master's degree*. Authors: Cliff Adelman, Peter Ewell, Paul Gaston, Carol Geary Schneider. Indianapolis, October 2014. Retrieved from: <http://degreeprofile.org/new-to-the-dqp/>. The website has a special page on DQP and Tuning: <http://degreeprofile.org/new-to-the-dqp/>

<sup>623</sup> Cliff Adelman, Senior Associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy; Peter Ewell, Vice President of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems; Paul Gaston, Trustees Professor at Kent State University and Carol Geary Schneider, President of the Association of American Colleges & Universities.

Lumina to foster the attainment of *Goal 20%25*<sup>624</sup> ranges from *inter alia* Tuning and the DQP through Competency Based Education, New Business Models, funding arrangements, completion, credentials framework.<sup>625</sup>

By 2010 the need was felt to check whether in two world regions, the USA and Europe, the intended modernisation of learning was actually taking place and how this process was perceived by its main stakeholders. To find this out, an initial study was set up and implemented during the period 2011-2012, the purpose of which was to develop robust evaluation survey instruments.<sup>626</sup> Already during the implementation of this first study, the need was felt for extension to other stakeholder groups, graduates and employers and to enhance and deepen the existing set. This resulted in a follow-up study, which covered the period July 2013 – January 2016. Although limiting the initiative to Europe and the USA, it was clearly understood that it should be structured in such a way to allow, at a later stage, the whole “Tuning Family” in all of its aspects (the nuclear family, the extended family, the dispersed family and the disenchanted family) stretching around the globe to adopt the methodology. What must be recognised is that local contexts, conditions, traditions and imperatives affect the way in which the Tuning competence/learning outcomes based approach develops. Whether implemented in Africa, Canada, China, Russia, Central Asia, the United States, Latin America or Europe (or indeed in any of the other areas where Tuning is being used) the need for evidence based analysis is there, requiring a robust evaluation process to be able to be tailored to the local, national or regional context.

This chapter covers the outcomes of this challenging study. The EU part of the study was co-financed by the European Union<sup>627</sup>, the USA part by Lumina Foundation. The findings presented here focus in particular on Europe, being sometimes referenced against those of the USA. This is to ensure that the focus is clear and to enable policy implications to be analysed and ways forward to be suggested in a European context.

## The Study

The study recognised from the outset that a robust methodology was required. Operating across two continents it had to be developed with care, cultur-

<sup>624</sup> This goal refers to a shortfall in the US of nearly 20 million college credentials in 10 years. Allie Bidwell, College Attainment Progress Won't Meet 2025 Goal, in: *US News and World Report*, 9 April 2015: <https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2015/04/09/lumina-college-attainment-progress-wont-meet-2025-goal>

<sup>625</sup> See: [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org)

<sup>626</sup> Tender reference first phase of study: Negotiated procedure EAC-2010-1243

<sup>627</sup> Tender reference second phase of study: Negotiated procedure EAC-03/2013

ally, linguistically (English was used across the Study, because multiple translations were just not possible) and in terms of the time for respondents to complete the online surveys. A great deal of development work, that is the cycle of testing, improving as a result of the testing, 'translating' context and language – and then finalising the evaluation instruments, was needed. These survey instruments were designed to gather information and thus provide evidence of the relative impact on the learning environment as a result of the Tuning/learning outcomes process/approach or of comparable initiatives and activities. In terms of impact this should be evidenced by changes in behaviour brought about by adopting the Tuning process or comparable Learning Outcomes based processes, by changes in learning and teaching strategies and methodologies and by the provision of learning opportunities and assessment of student learning. This has to be set against the overall objective of the student-centred approach to prepare graduates better for their role in society, both in terms of employability and citizenship.

The approach reflects the paradigm shift from input or staff/expert driven learning to output based student-centred learning. This shift has been promoted in the framework of the Bologna Process and in reform processes that Tuning has also initiated in other parts of the world. Although the Tuning approach has been received well and is widely used today, there is only limited evidence about how effective the student-centred approach is in practice for today's and tomorrow's society. Of course, where Tuning Projects have taken place, there is a strong 'brand recognition' amongst the academic staff (faculty), who have participated. However, it must be said that, beyond these project participants (admittedly thousands of people around the globe), there is little 'brand recognition'. Then, throughout the Study, those participating could, if they recognised Tuning, choose – through the 'skip logic' used in the present survey, see later – that very route which makes use of Tuning terminology or alternatively go down the 'learning outcomes approach' terminology route.

In both the USA (for example *A Culture of Evidence: An evidence based approach to accountability for student learning outcomes*<sup>628</sup>) and Europe there was a demand for up to date hard data to be collected using a single methodology (surveys), allowing analysis by project, subject, institution, region and group, plus the qualitative data (visits) to compare with the quantitative data. Previous attempts at gathering such data had been undertaken, in various guises.

In Europe there have been the various European University Association *TRENDS (I – VII)* reports which clearly illustrate the long and winding road that needs to be followed to achieve some degree of change. The following extracts

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<sup>628</sup> Millett, Catherine M. et al, *A Culture of Evidence: An Evidence-Centered Approach to Accountability for Student Learning Outcomes*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2008. Retrieved from:

and references illustrate what has happened over the past 17 years (*TRENDS I* and *II*<sup>629</sup> had largely analysed what was in place and how change might develop). For example: *TRENDS III* (2003)<sup>630</sup> identified what it called the ‘gaps’ between levels of perceived adoption of changes (see “disconnect” later) as well as the rising star of ECTS and the challenge of student centred learning. *TRENDS IV* in 2005<sup>631</sup> undertook a major set of visits and asked some general questions about change in learning. *TRENDS V* (2007)<sup>632</sup> stated that: “the most significant legacy would be a change of educational paradigm [...]; institutions are gradually moving away from a teacher-driven provision, and towards a student-centred concept of higher education”. *TRENDS VI* (2010)<sup>633</sup> stated: “some institutions have begun to support pedagogical skills’ developments and curricular reforms but that these changes entail many challenges. [...] Student-centered learning entails a more creative approach to teaching and therefore even more hours spent on developing new ways of teaching. Institutions must find ways to motivate academic staff to spend the time required to design, evaluate and re-design their modules, if necessary, and to assume different roles”. Then there is *TRENDS VII* (2015)<sup>634</sup> asking: “To what extent have learning and teaching moved up as institutional priorities? How extensive has the shift been to student-centred learning across Europe and is this shift supported by national and institutional policies and other measures (e.g. funding, staff development, internal and external quality assurance procedures)?” A good deal of attention is given to learning (ICT, internationalization etc.) and it is reported that: “Given the interest of national authorities and policy makers in the EHEA, it is not surprising that the implementation of a learning-outcome approach has been an important development for 60% of institutions. As a result, by 2015, 64% have applied it to all courses and 21% to some courses. This shows a continuing progression since *TRENDS 2010*, when 53% had applied it to all courses and 32% to some’. Is this implementation or wholesale adoption? Is it documentary lip-service or a shift in paradigm, practice and purpose?”

In the case of the present study, implementation of the Visits proved to be challenging. Cooperation of Higher Education Institutions was not always easy to organise. In fact, there were many institutions and their staff that were approached, who were reluctant to discuss the state of affairs in their institution. Some simply stated that position whilst with others their degree of obfuscation and prevarication rendered a Visit impossible. This hampered the collection of data. Also too many institutions did not promote participation in the surveys,

<sup>629</sup> EHEA website: <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=87>

<sup>630</sup> European University Association, *TRENDS III*

<sup>631</sup> European University Association, *TRENDS IV*

<sup>632</sup> European University Association, *TRENDS V*

<sup>633</sup> European University Association, *TRENDS VI*

<sup>634</sup> European University Association, *TRENDS VII*



for whatever reason – ‘survey overload’ might be one the causes. This applied to both Europe and the USA. It proved to be necessary to extend the original project period of the study to meet the planned objectives.

Nevertheless, the outcomes presented here offer – in the view of the research team – a picture of the actual situation regarding the implementation process of the modernisation of Higher Education. Although the team found excellent examples of good practice, the overall picture is worrying. It seems that the discourse related to the paradigm shift is now landing, but that overall the actual implementation is very slow to commence or, indeed, not taking place at all. Only at places where tailored action has taken place, initiated by individuals because they were involved in specific initiatives such as Tuning, Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs) and/or ECTS related activities or other projects, it seems that serious progress has been made.

When the findings in this Study are compared to the *Bologna Implementation report 2015*<sup>635</sup>, the already quoted European University Association (EUA) *TRENDS VII: Learning and Teaching in European Universities* report<sup>636</sup> and the European Students’ Union (ESU) *Bologna with student eyes 2015: Time to meet the expectation from 1999* report<sup>637</sup>, it seems that the state of implementation at higher education institutional level is even weaker than is stated in those reports. It is worth noting in this respect that in the ESU *Peer Assessment of Student Centred Learning ‘Putting students at the heart of learning’* (2015)<sup>638</sup>, it is observed that “Institutional reviews [...] rarely signify the aspect of teaching and learning as a core one, which also gives a false signal to the institutional leadership about priorities of management”.

## Methodology

The initial project statement was driven by the need for evidence concerning how far the student-centred approach in higher education has been taken up in institutions. To address this aim, a mixed methodology was tailored and fine-tuned, using quantitative and qualitative indicators. The ultimate aim was to test whether this student-centred approach addresses current issues better than the traditional forms of education in the European Union.

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<sup>635</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

<sup>636</sup> European University Association, *TRENDS VII*

<sup>637</sup> European Students’ Union, *Bologna with student eyes 2015*

<sup>638</sup> PASCL website: <http://pascl.eu/publications/overview-on-student-centred-learning-in-higher-education-in-europe/>

The evaluation process reflected in this study is based on two pillars: quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative or inner instruments are based on a set of surveys for which the well-established SurveyMonkey tool was used, in which the respondent could self-identify as either being more familiar with Tuning or with the learning outcomes/ competences/ student-centred approach and as a result have the questions framed in language appropriate to that selection (so called 'skip logic'): (1) questionnaires for academic staff and institutional management, (2) questionnaire for students (3) questionnaires for graduates and (4) questionnaires for employers. Questionnaires 1 and 2 were developed as part of the first phase of the Study and focus on the reception and implementation of the approach. For the survey the instrument of 'multiple-choice'/ 'closed questions' (set response possibilities) was applied. It contained a variety of type of questions: yes/no; four options: yes/somewhat/ no/ I don't know; and questions which allowed for multiple answers, e.g. what modes of instructional delivery do you use in your teaching?<sup>639</sup> The sets of questions and related answers were carefully phrased and piloted twice before going to scale as part of the second phase of the Study. Many questions and possible responses required fine-tuning as a result of the field tests. The questions included in the questionnaires were the result of intense cooperation between the EU and the US team. During this process sensitivities regarding educational models and use of terms came to light and required accommodation. Having started with common models it was then decided that it was necessary to split these into European and US versions, taking in to account linguistic, cultural and context differences, but keeping exactly the same methodology and core questions about the educational process.

Questionnaires 3 and 4 were mainly developed during the latter stages of the Study and focus on the effectiveness of the (Tuning) competences/learning outcomes approach for career development. They both need further field-testing before going to scale. The same self-identifying approach was applied for the 3 larger questionnaires to make these as user friendly as possible. The operational questionnaires could be accessed (and indeed completed) via the Tuning websites<sup>640</sup>.

Involving institutions and their staff and students to complete the questionnaires proved not to be a simple process of distribution. In January 2014 tailored

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<sup>639</sup> See for more detail the report prepared for the European Commission: Birtwistle, Tim and Robert Wagenaar, *A Long Way to Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU and the USA*. Final report. Groningen: International Tuning Academy, 2016.

<sup>640</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe website, EU/US research project: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/component/content/article/385-euus-research-project.html>, accessed March 18th 2016.

action was required by the EU Steering Group to identify more institutions to be involved, approaching various representative bodies in Europe, making an open invitation to complete the surveys, identifying persons previously involved in projects. A spreadsheet was set up to track contacts and responses.

The second pillar covered the qualitative approach using what were referred to as the outer instruments. For this part the research teams in the US and Europe were both extended with researchers. The team in Europe was made up of 5 members, covering 4 nationalities, to be able to operate in pairs. In the original set-up of the study, it was foreseen that the “outer instrument” sessions (focus groups, interviews etc.) would be conducted initially by two members, an expert and graduate assistant, then by the graduate assistant only with periodic sampling and validation of the process by a Steering Committee member. In practice it proved necessary to involve for each session two experienced researchers, because of the size of the groups to interview, the complexity of the issues at stake and the note taking. For each visit a report was drawn-up. The approach used in Europe was mirrored in the United States. The reports from these sessions were aggregated ensuring anonymity whilst at the same time allowing for accurate analysis. The visits were constructed around the following headings: 1. Introduction; 2. General information about the visit/ Basic information; 3. Level of implementation of learning outcomes/competences approach at Institutional/ Programme/ course units level; 4. Kind of information/support for teachers provided by the institution to use Learning Outcomes/competences approach; 5. Strengths, weaknesses and main challenges occurred in teaching, learning and assessment strategies by using the Learning Outcomes/competences approach; 6. Changes and impact of learning outcomes/competence approach in student performance; 7. Students’ perspective on learning outcomes/competence approach and utility for them to find a suitable job; 8. “Tuning” dissemination in the institution (projects, materials, implementation, etc.); 9. Main conclusions of the visit including recommendations. Prior to each visit a rigorous analysis of all on-line information available in the public domain was undertaken, this then allowed for a further comparison between the results gathered during the visit, responses to the on-line surveys and the ‘public face’ of the institution.

These qualitative instruments inform about behaviour(s) and attitude(s) of key stakeholders regarding redesigning/enhancing of curricula; formulating competences and learning outcomes statements and their practical use; learning opportunities and structures; assessment of students; communication of learning outcomes to students and other stakeholders, etc. This should lead to some clear evidence whether the use of the student-centred approach has a (positive) effect on student and staff motivation and performances resulting in higher success rates. Data collected from the first Pilot provided indicators of change.

In the EU 14 site visits took place, spread over higher education Institutions from as many countries<sup>641</sup>. The available budget did not allow for more visits. The selection of institutions was made in stages. First countries to involve were selected. These should cover the whole of Europe as well as different teaching and learning systems. Countries were selected in which some level of implementation of the student-centred approach was expected. Within the selected countries, institutions were identified which can be seen as representative for the country and the state of affairs in that country. In each institution to departments were visited, preferably reflecting studies in different academic domains/sectors.

## Terminology

The use of consistent terminology and well and broadly understood concepts are a crucial element for successful reforms. In this case the focus was on the paradigm shift from expert driven education to student-centred education based on the use of the competences/learning outcomes based approach. The outcomes of this study show there is (still) a lot of confusion about both terminology and concepts applied.

The reasons for this are manifold. Terminology is to a large extent culturally and historically bound. In the framework of the Bologna Process it has been agreed to use English as the lingua franca. However, using an English term does not automatically imply that such a term has the same meaning and connotation in other countries. A good example is the term 'competences'. In the UK this term is traditionally associated with more applied forms of education, such as vocational education and training, while in the USA and continental Europe it is perceived as encompassing knowledge, skills and (personal) attributes. Differences in understanding and interpretation of terms has led to many misunderstandings, also due to the way these have been translated in other languages. These misunderstandings have been boosted by the definitions and practical use of terminology in different European documents, two competing European Quali-

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<sup>641</sup> List of countries, states and subject areas:

*List of Countries:* Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden; *List of US states:* California, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Utah; *List of subject areas:* Administration, Aeronautics, Architecture, Arts, Banking and Finance, Biology, Biotechnology, Business, Business Administration, Chemistry, Christianity, Computer Science, Economics, Electrical Engineering, Electronics, Engineering, Facility Management, Foreign Languages, Gender Studies, History, Information Technology, International Business, Mathematics, Mechanical Engineering and Mechatronics, Media (TV & Radio), Medieval & Early Modern History, Modern British History, Pedagogy, Philosophy, Physics, Physiotherapy, Psychology.

fications Frameworks, ECTS Users' Guide, CEDEFOP terminology guide<sup>642</sup>, Tuning documents, etc.

The many websites, course catalogues and course manuals of the universities studied by the research team reflect the confusion in use of terminology. Concepts (and terms) such as competences, learning goals and objectives and programme and module/unit learning outcomes are in the vast majority of documents mixed up and used interchangeably. Misunderstanding exists also about the term student-centred education, not meaning a cafeteria model<sup>643</sup>, but flexible programmes covering a particular field of study, allowing for individual profiling with the aim to preparing students most effectively for their future role in society.<sup>644</sup>

Just for reasons of clarity, we include here (again) the definitions applied, of which most have been explained in more detail in chapter 5, *Competences and learning outcomes*. In Tuning the term 'competence' represents a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values. It is complementary with the definition used by the EQF for Lifelong Learning. In this overarching framework – making a distinction between knowledge, skills and competences – the following definition is used: 'competence' means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. This is based on the assumption that these have been acquired at an earlier stage in the learning process.<sup>645</sup>

Learning outcomes are defined as statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. According to Tuning Learning outcomes are expressed in terms of the

<sup>642</sup> CEDEFOP, *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 130 key terms*. Second edition, Luxembourg, 2014.

<sup>643</sup> A misunderstanding has been created in this respect when defining student-centred learning as 'an approach to learning in which learners choose not only *what* to study but also *how* and *why* that topic might be of interest. See: Rogers, C. (1983). As a teacher, can I be myself? *In Freedom to learn for the 80s*. Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1983; Jeffrey Froyd, Nancy Simpson from Texas A&M University give a comprehensive overview what is understood by student-centred learning from the perspective of the teacher in their paper Student-Centered Learning Addressing Faculty Questions about Student-centered Learning (2010

<sup>644</sup> The European Student Union applies the following definition of student-centred learning: A learning approach characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and students and which takes students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical and reflective thinking. Education International and European Student Union, *Time for a new paradigm in education: student-centred-learning. Learning SCL toolkit*, Brussels, 2010, 4. Retrieved from: [http://www.aic.lv/bolona/2010/Reports/SCL\\_toolkit\\_ESU\\_EL.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/bolona/2010/Reports/SCL_toolkit_ESU_EL.pdf).

<sup>645</sup> European Commission, *The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)*, 11.

*level of competence* to be obtained by the learner. They relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks. The term is applied in the context of the student-centred approach.

Learning objectives, finally, can be defined as clear and concise statements that describe what the teacher intend the students to learn by the end of the course. It outlines the material intended to be covered or the questions related to the discipline that the class will address. This approach means in practice that the focus is on the teaching process (instead of the learning process) and on knowledge transfer of the teacher to the students. Learning objectives express knowledge acquisition and transfer and the term is part of the paradigm of the staff-centred approach. In the USA learning objectives are often defined as learning outcomes. This has contributed to the confusion of terms.<sup>646</sup>

In this study the definitions used were as defined by Tuning and applied worldwide, in particular the ones regarding competences and learning outcomes<sup>647</sup>. In Tuning terms, learning outcomes set a level of competence to be achieved, basing it on the idea that the role of education is to make the learner more competent. It also allows for making the important distinction between disciplinary based competences and general or transversal ones to be developed in the context of a field of studies which are also included in the 2015 version of the ECTS Users' Guide.

What has not been to date sufficiently understood, from the methodological point of view, is the difference between 'learning outcomes' and the 'outcomes of learning'. The latter is a very broad evaluation of the total gain made by a learner throughout their studies. This includes formal, informal and non-formal learning. This is a very relevant distinction, because the institution is manifestly responsible for the learning outcomes of its programmes; it can only be partly responsible for the total experience of learning, social interaction, maturation, etc.

It became apparent during the course of the visits, in particular the structured interviews with students, that there is a disconnect between the levels of communication regarding student learning outcomes and the value that students place, for obvious reasons, on their total learning experience, including other activities: group work, project work, work experience, etc. The students need to

<sup>646</sup> See for example: The Glossary for Education Reform: <http://edglossary.org/learning-objectives/>; Another example of the mixing-up of terms is: Raoul A. Arreola, Writing Learning Objectives. A Teaching Resource Document from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Planning and Academic Support, The University of Tennessee, Memphis, s.a.

<sup>647</sup> Anna Serbati, Implementation of Competence-Based Learning Approach: stories of practices and the Tuning contribution to academic innovation, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education, Growing Tuning Seeds*, Vol. 3, No.1, November 2015; See also: Jenneke Lokhoff, Bas Wegevijs, Katja Durkin, Robert Wagenaar, Julia González, Ann Katherine Isaacs, Luigi F. Donà dalle Rose and Mary Gobbi, eds., *A Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles. Including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes*. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague, 2010.

pass the hurdles to obtain their reward but they also wanted a rounded total experience to be better employable.

## Survey results

The opening questions of the survey were used to establish the context within which the respondent worked/studied: institution, post, how long in post, subject area, cycle of study and year of study etc. This data is of use to the researchers because it enables a helicopter view of where the responses are coming from and thus an oversight of the project spread. The responses came from a wide range of countries, institutions, post-holders, cycles of study, subject areas. With a number of questions respondents were asked to check all applicable options, thus the numbers do not always add up to 100%.

### *SURVEY 1: 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Process and Impact'*

The survey counted 399 respondents in total. Of the EU respondents, 70% were academic staff, 20% were management and leadership and 10% were student advisors or counsellors. However, in the EU, many respondents wore multiple hats, as both academic staff and management and leadership. So there is some overlap where a respondent could be counted for both the academic staff and other categories. Of the American respondents 42% were faculty members, 46% were adjunct/contingent faculty, 2% were deans, 6% were department chairs and 4% wore a variety of other hats. In total 83.5% of the academics/faculty completing the survey have been in post for more than 5 years (for administrators and other staff it was 54.8%).

When asked if they felt "informed" regarding expectations for their courses about how they relate to the discipline and/or degree programs 53.9% of EU staff said 'Yes' and 46.2% said 'No' (for the US the Yes count was much higher).

Regarding what students might receive credit for only 29.7% of EU respondents stated that recognition of informal prior learning was given, but 85.4% said that recognition for formal prior learning is the case. Only 14.6% said yes for Massive Open Online Courses and 22.8% for experiential learning. In all cases the figures were significantly lower from the US respondents.

Regarding methods of delivery in all cases a variety of modes are used but again with significant differences between the EU and the US, much higher figures being returned from the EU respondents showing that 93.7% use campus-based learning, 60.8% use flipped classrooms, 7.6% use MOOCs, 50.6% use blended learning and 28.4% use online only delivery.

Given the history of the use of ECTS in much of the EU, it is not surprising that academics say they take into consideration student workload when planning courses. In fact 96.2% said this is the case (the figure is lower from the US).

When asked how the curriculum is defined, the vast majority (in both the EU with 80.3% and the US) said that it is in terms of learning outcomes and competences. About 12.5% still cling to the use of aims and objectives and 6% stated 'other'.

Of those who stated defining their curricula on the basis of learning outcomes/competences, most academics/faculty gathered information to help define these through discussions with colleagues at their institution, but some also frequently gathered information from discussions with colleagues at other institutions as well as students at their institution, as can be learned from the survey outcomes presented below. Multi-answers were allowed in responding to the question illustrated by Table 1.

*Table 1: How did you gather information to help define the learning outcomes and/or competences?*

Discussions with current students	48.7%
Discussions with discipline academic staff at my institution	81.2%
Discussions with faculty across subject areas/disciplines at my institution	58.1%
Discussions with faculty in my subject area/discipline in other institutions and sectors	45.3%
Discussions with professional organizations and/or discipline specific associations	30.8%
Discussions with other stakeholders (employers, alumni, community members, etc)	42.7%
Discussion has not been initiated	6.0%

As follow-up questions, staff members acquainted with the learning outcomes/competence approach were asked whether the curriculum designed had been a collaborative effort, and had been discussed and agreed by academic staff. The first part of this statement was answered positively by 48.2%, the second part by 66.4%. Respectively, 45.4% and 29.1% answered that to a certain extent ('somewhat') these elements had played a role. Asked whether academic staff discussed student learning, degree outcomes, and competences, 63.4% confirmed this was the case. 51.4% stated that the discourse had changed focusing more on these topics. Respectively, 25.7% and 36.7% mention there had been some impact. The USA surveys proved to be more or less comparable to the EU outcomes.



High percentages of respondents acquainted with the learning outcomes/competences approach agreed that as a result of using this approach, learning outcomes are more integrated in the classroom, that course learning outcomes align with degree programme learning outcomes, and that the syllabus references learning outcomes. Respondents felt less strongly that the course catalogue reflects the learning outcomes for each course. In more detail: 56.4% of the respondents answered that the course catalogue reflected the learning outcomes for the degree and 62.9% for each course. Respectively 39.1% and 26.6% thought this was the case to a certain extent. 74.5% stated that their unit learning outcomes were consistent with the programme learning outcomes, 18.2% thought this was partly the case. This relates to the answers to the question whether 'my syllabus' includes learning outcomes/competences, which 79.3% think is really the case and 14.2% partly. 56.1% think the learning outcomes are integrated in assessment, learning, and teaching, 42.2% presume this is partly the case. Asked whether the advising and information materials described the learning outcomes at programme and course unit level 41.3% said this was the case and 47.7% to some extent. Finally, 51.8% stated that they discussed the learning outcomes with students and 39.3% 'somewhat'. The figures for the USA with regard to most of these statements are higher and significantly higher for 'integration of learning outcomes in teaching, learning and assessment' and 'discussion of learning outcomes with students'.

Multi-answers were allowed again in responding to the question illustrated by Table 2.

*Table 2: As a result of using a learning outcomes/competencies approach to what extent do you agree with the following?*

NB the extent was rated on a scale from 1 to 3, see Table headings. The *Mean*, which is shown in the two last two columns reflects the answer of respondents on this scale.

%	1 – Yes	2 – Some-what	3 – No	I don't know*	USA Mean	EU Mean
The learning outcomes/competences approach drives the way I structure my courses	EU 56.1% Tot. 61.3%	EU 39.3% Tot. 32.3%	EU 3.7% Tot. 5.5%	EU 0.9% Tot. 0.9%	1.43	1.45
I make adjustments throughout the term in my teaching when I see the students are not achieving the learning outcomes	EU 34.9% Tot: 52.1%	EU 43.1% Tot. 35.2%	EU 21.1% Tot. 12.3%	EU 0.9% Tot. 0.5%	1.42	1.88

%	1 – Yes	2 – Some-what	3 – No	I don't know*	USA Mean	EU Mean
I have broadened my perspective of the entire curriculum by tailoring my specialization to the needs of the degree program	EU 34.9% Tot. 39.7%	EU 49.1% Tot. 38.8%	EU 12.3% Tot. 15.9%	EU 3.8% Tot. 5.6%	1.74	1.76
My assessments are based on learning outcomes	EU 62.6% Tot. 71.4%	EU 31.8% Tot. 21.2%	EU 2.8% Tot. 5.1%	EU 2.8% Tot. 2.3%	1.33	1.31
Student engagement has improved	EU 34.3% Tot. 38.5%	EU 34.3% Tot. 34.9%	EU 20.4% Tot. 15.6%	EU 11.1% Tot. 11.0%	1.69	1.83
Student learning is a central indicator of quality	EU 55.7% Tot. 66.5%	EU 37.7% Tot. 26.0%	EU 4.7% Tot. 3.7%	EU 1.9% Tot. 3.7%	1.29	1.43
There is an opportunity for an end of course open dialog with students to discuss the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved	EU 45.4% Tot. 40.5%	EU 38.9% Tot. 28.9%	EU 12.1% Tot. 27.5%	EU 3.7% Tot. 3.2%	2.0	1.67

\* Please, note that “I don't know” responses were eliminated in *Mean* calculation

As a result of using a learning outcomes approach, the majority of respondents felt that student learning is an indicator of quality, the learning outcomes/competences approach drives the way they structure their courses and that assessments are based on learning outcomes. Fewer participants felt that they had tailored their specialisation to the needs of the degree programme.

Respondents felt that the most positive impact from applying a learning outcomes approach came from the way they assess learning (40.7%), the way they present their course materials (48.2%) and state course outcomes (50.9%), the alignment of the curriculum and courses to the learning outcomes (43.5%), the way they teach (55.6%) and discussions with students (49.1%). Student engagement (31.5%), type of discussions with colleagues in the field (24.1%), the impact on quality assurance mechanisms (28.8%) and the development of a common language in the discipline scores significantly lower (19.4%). The impact on the quality of programme scores 41.7%. The figures for the USA are significantly lower.

### *SURVEY 2: the EU students*

Out of a total of 666 respondents, 86% were from the first or second cycles (53% and 33% respectively). Short cycle, doctoral candidates and ‘traditional’ long or single cycle students were also represented. Respondents were also from

every year of study (1 to 6) and from across the spectrum of subject areas (architecture to zoology).

When asked how their curriculum is defined, 67.1% said ‘learning outcomes’ but 70.3% said ‘objectives’ with 57% stating competences. This is at variance with the responses from academic staff/faculty (see above) and also with the findings from the visits (see later).

To test the levels of communication a series of questions were asked of the students, as illustrated by Table 3.

*Table 3: Levels of communication*

	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Don't know
When I was advised on course unit selection there was a focus on the competences I would gain	10.3%	53.9%	26.2%	9.6%
My discipline/degree programme has a clear statement of expectations	4.7%	39.2%	52.6%	3.6%
I understand why I am required to take the course units needed to earn my degree	6.1%	35%	56.1%	2.9%
My workload is appropriate to achieve the learning outcomes of the course unit	10.1%	37.6%	49.8%	3.6%
Advisors are able to provide a clear explanation of how course units fit into a bigger picture	14.1%	46.8%	33.1%	6%
The course catalogue states the learning outcomes for each unit	10.4%	36.7%	46.2%	6.8%
The course catalogue states the learning outcomes for my degree	9.2%	38.3%	44.4%	8.1%
Progression routes to a degree are clearly stated and explained	13.5%	36%	43.4%	7.2%

In only two cases over 50% of the students indicated they believe ‘very much’ that they are getting a clear explanation of what they need to do and why they need to do it to achieve their degree. ‘Somewhat’ figures are large in all categories but the visits show that often ‘somewhat’ is a kind way of saying ‘no’. This indicates a gap<sup>648</sup> (‘disconnect’) between what academics and management believe and what the students perceive and believe they are experiencing.

<sup>648</sup> ‘Gap’ is the term first used in *TRENDS III 2003*

It does appear that the level of discussion of learning outcomes in class (23.9% saying ‘very much’ and 75% stating ‘not at all’ or ‘somewhat’) and at the end of the course (24.4% saying ‘very much’ and 70% ‘not at all’ or ‘somewhat’) is disappointing. The connection between the learning outcomes and the assignments is slightly higher (41.8% saying ‘very much’) but even so disappointing (once again the meaning of ‘somewhat’ is a problem).

51% of the academic staff state they discuss learning outcomes with students ‘very much’ and 39% ‘somewhat’ compared to the 23.5% and 51% respectively felt to be the case by the students. The gap shows. Moreover, 45.4% of academic staff state that there is ‘very much’ an opportunity for an open discussion with students at the end of the course whereas only 24.4% of the students feel this is the case. The gap (‘disconnect’) is writ large.

Some main conclusions can be drawn from the surveys. The results in Europe and the USA are largely comparable. However, it is clear that care must be taken when interpreting these survey/questionnaire results because earlier examples in the Bologna Process show there is a tendency to overestimate one’s own performance to leave a more positive impression, even if this is subconscious. This has been noticed with regard to both the official Stocktaking and the TRENDS Reports over the years.<sup>649</sup> The same tendency might also to be the case with these surveys if compared with the outcomes of the in-depth visits (see below). This seems not only to be true in the ‘yes’ responses, but in particular in the ‘somewhat’ responses.

## Visits process and results

Process:

As has been said (see above) setting up the visits proved to be very difficult. Some institutions actually stated that they felt they were not ready for such “scrutiny” (term used by them, although we kept stressing – at every stage of communication with all approached – that these visits were research visits and not, in any way, shape or form of validation or providing feedback to any outsiders or agencies, but that, on the contrary, the visits were learning opportunities because of the feedback). Others prevaricated such that time ran out (giving a feeling of not wanting to take part) and some made every effort to accommodate the visit and to lay themselves open to analysis in the true spirit of the visits and the research objectives<sup>650</sup>.

<sup>649</sup> TRENDS Reports III, IV, V, VI and VII; Bologna Stocktaking reports 2005, 2007 and 2009.

<sup>650</sup> As described in detail in Section 2 and 3 above, the aim of EU-US Study on the *implementation of the Learning Outcomes/Competences approach* was simply to determine the extent

In the end 14 visits across all EU took place, from research intensive universities to those with a teaching only mission, encompassing a wide breadth of missions and sizes. There was no visit to a private for profit institution, but this was not for the lack of asking.

In the set up phase it was sent the same information to each institution approached as well as a suggested format for a single full day visit. The categories of persons the team hoped to see were stated but whom the team did see was up to the institution, depending on the availabilities in different subject areas. This led to a wide range of subject staff and students being seen but also some repetition of subject areas – this did not matter because the original evaluation had been that, apart from subjects directly involved in Tuning, Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs) or ECTS projects from a particular institution, the methodology was unlikely to have been influenced apart from by national policies (the national qualifications framework, quality assurance mechanisms, diploma supplement, continuing professional development requirements etc.).

Once the visit date had been agreed (and researchers allocated – from a calendar of availability) an internet search of the institution took place. This looked at references to the national qualifications framework, diploma supplement (examples and availability), quality assurance mechanisms (internal and external), availability of in-house staff development, degree profile, curriculum, unit learning outcomes, any sample assessments etc. This formed Part 2 of the institutional feedback report and informed the researchers (and institution) of the public face of the institution.

At the end of each visit the researchers gave informal feedback to the institution – to whom this was given varied by institution as it was for them to decide. The next step was that a draft report be sent for correction of factual elements. Following any required amendments of fact, the final report was sent.

It is important to note that anonymity was promised, no institution or individual would be identified or identifiable. Each institution received a copy of the final report.

### Findings:

There are certain recurring themes from the visits (and these do actually show to varying extents but are nonetheless present across the continents). The main headlines are:

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to which universities have adopted it. Recall that the methodology used a variety of instruments to find evidence (mixed methodology: online questionnaire plus in-depth interviews).

- Varied institutions display varied behaviour:

Higher education activity still falls largely in to three categories: teaching, research, management and administration. The nuances of each of these have changed over the years and continue to change. Institutions have proliferated and with that (and the change in most places to mass participation systems even where there is still selection based on prior educational achievement) the variety of missions has changed and the mix of the elements. However, there are students in universities and they are there to learn. The mission of the university will impact on the learning process as will funding patterns, the political will of the state, the background of the student population, etc. However, as was stated in *Modernisation of Higher Education (2013)*<sup>651</sup>: “With this report, we put quality of teaching and learning centre stage” and “Our focus, therefore, is on the quality of teaching and learning for those who enter or who hope to enter higher education in the future.”

Some institutions visited were highly micro managed – this impacted upon the curriculum, staff development, the mix of workload for staff, student staff ratios, assessment calendar, appraisal systems, internal quality assurance etc. Across the spectrum then there were: central macro management, devolved management, self-management within institutional parameters. All styles leading to varied operating environments.

What is clear is that there is a disconnect between what different tiers of responsibility believe/imagine is the higher education landscape and what those who actually participate in the learning process experience. This appeared to some extent in each and every institution visited. If one looks at 2015 statements regarding the Bologna Process at the higher policy levels, awareness about its implications is writ large, with the corresponding “font size” diminishing progressively down the levels until there is – in some places, it has to be said – a total lack of actual experience by the students of any active knowledge of, and participation in, the learning outcomes process.

This metaphor recognizes that there is a lack of progress but, as the research results show, not the full extent of the actual lack of progress.

- Insufficient learning alignment:

By learning alignment is meant the continuum of the learning environment from learning outcomes (LO) to the learning activities (LA) to the all essential

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<sup>651</sup> High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe’s higher education institutions. June 2013*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013, 7 and 12.

learning assessment (LA), hence the frequently used term of 'LO,LA,LA'. None of these segments is free standing and can make any meaningful contribution to the learning process without the other two. Learning outcomes are not a passive ossified artefact but must be active (and thus subject to re-evaluation and change after an appropriate feedback loop). The learning activities must reflect the learning outcomes and are now required (European Standards and Guidelines 1.3 2015) to: “encourage students to take an active role in creating the learning process” leading on to learning assessment that “reflects the approach” (that is reflects the student involvement).

Once again there was a disconnect here; it varied in magnitude as did the institutions vary. However, although a few institutions were making very positive (in some cases strident) requirements of their staff to engage in all aspects of learning alignment, there remained a lack of report back from students that they could see the connection and that there had been continued efforts to both engage them in the process and to continually communicate with them. So, even where efforts were clear and demonstrable there was still a lack of meaningful penetration. Imagine how disappointing it was where there was no management drive or institutional buy in to ensuring that the learning outcomes approach and learning alignment were embedded in the warp and weft of the learning experience. Such a situation was sometimes totally obvious and showed no signs of there being a “learning spring” around the corner.

In some sessions the lack of engagement by staff involved in pedagogics with the learning outcomes approach was clear (“what do we want to know about learning outcomes for?”). If those who are custodians of the development of learning show a total disregard for student-centred/learning outcomes, what hope is there for a paradigm shift?

Where staff development was taking place which engaged with why and how the change from didactic expert driven delivery to student centred/learning outcomes facilitation of learning (with learning alignment) many staff did both welcome this and fully engage with it. Where there was active engagement in mentoring/coaching, this too made a positive difference. Where there had been involvement in projects such as Tuning or in the past ECTS, that also made a positive difference. Where there was institutional indifference or mere lip service, that, not surprisingly, had a negative impact.

- Vocabulary, semiotics, messaging and communication:

Any systematic search through university websites reveals much. Of course there are claimed problems with updating, editing, proof reading. However, the evidence on the websites (prior to a visit) is then confirmed by the visits – there is a lack of consistency in the use of terminology and vocabulary and then doc-

uments, web pages, course handbooks, and study manuals. Discussions then did confirm the confusion. Does this matter? Yes, it does matter because confusion abounds when terms are used inconsistently, interchangeably and incorrectly.

There is no single definition of terms such as ‘competences’, ‘learning outcomes’, ‘learning alignment’, ‘student-centred learning’ but there are recognized definitions used consistently in policy documents and working documents (for example ECTS Users’ Guide 2015, Tuning documents, Frameworks etc.). Adherence to these more commonly used and available definitions with the phrase ‘for the purpose of this document we use the following definitions’ would at least start to eliminate wider confusion and would certainly limit internal institutional confusion.

At meetings on the visits staff commonly used ‘competence’ and ‘learning outcome’ as interchangeable terms. Slipping back in to the language of the former paradigm (expert driven delivery), for example ‘learning goals/objectives’ rather than the language of the new paradigm, for example ‘learning outcome’ is more than a slip of the tongue. The semiotics of this is one of confusion, lack of clarity, lack of determination to join the paradigm shift and therefore lack of consistency.

This confusion is commonplace. The lack of consistent messaging and communication does lead the stakeholders (across the spectrum) to lack in belief that a paradigm shift is underway, let alone that it has been achieved. This also leads to the question (see above) of how can there be learning alignment when there is a lack of clarity as to what it is that is being aligned. These are more than issues of editing and proof reading; they are issues of a true buy in to the paradigm shift.

- Staff development:

Staff development is a crucial issue. Without staff development the change in paradigm will remain stalled but it must encompass the “why and how” not merely the process of form filling. There must be engagement with the staff and this was said and gained in the visits. Where there was active engagement in mentoring/coaching, involvement in projects (such as Tuning or in the past ECTS), that made a positive difference but institutional indifference or lip service that made a negative difference.

Those members of the staff who want to engage and master the learning outcomes approach, and many interviewed were of that mind, felt stranded both by lack of training and by the pull towards research and away from teaching as a career enhancement. It was often mentioned that at the outset of the introduction of their national qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes, there had been some training. From what was said, such development was either



viewed as a done deal or any attempt to deal with concepts, benefits etc. was abandoned and replaced by process training. This was anathema to the staff. They want concepts, benefits, links etc. and not form filling to comply with internal QA and audit requirements.

Where new projects were launched (for example joint degrees, centres of excellence in teaching etc.) there did tend to be a reinvigoration of training, or often what was much liked was in-house mentoring/coaching and peer-to-peer activities and evaluation of documents. These ventures were both cost effective and engendered a collegial spirit.

A main challenge for Higher Education Institutions is that too often there is lack of a well-established unit for staff-development. Some examples of excellent staff development provision were found either at university or faculty/school level. Some provision was also at country level. In general, it has to be noted, however, there is low priority for establishing and sustaining such centres. In many institutions there was a lack of informed trainers. As mentioned above, staff will not accept sub-standard process driven 'training'. They want to understand the concept and benefits of the new paradigm. Without this, it is feared that this shift will not take place. Use should be made of examples of good practice, which for some of the countries visited will be in other countries and therefore require an international endeavour.

- Student reaction

All meetings with students were interesting, stimulating and regrettably confirmed beyond reasonable doubt the disconnect that exists between even the most pessimistic of the 2015 reports cited above (BWSE linked to the ESU country coordinator reports) and the reality shown on the ground by the responses of the student interviews. The disconnect was confirmed by the consistent themes that they disclosed, namely: lack of (perceived) communication; lack of understanding of the gains to be had from having a good understanding of their studies and of what they would know, understand and be able to do on completing units of learning; that they displayed learning behaviour immersed in the former paradigm – what are we told, what information do we have, what are the past assessments, how can we best get through this subject. Thus in terms of the learning outcomes approach there was only evidence of a lack of penetration and understanding at first cycle in the vast majority of cases and at second cycle with some evidence of impact, particularly amongst mature students. In terms of student-centred learning, of course the European Standards and Guidelines 1.3 2015 is too recent to have impacted on process, but, notwithstanding this, at first cycle level there was very limited evidence of this shift, at second cycle there were some green shoots of development.

Students were not convinced that there was any link between what was demanded of them and any description, or analysis, of what outcomes they would achieve by the end of their learning. Some knew that they had been told by some staff of the learning outcomes at the start of their studies but few felt there was consistent communication and messaging about this. Those who did placements (work based learning, internships, stages etc.) did not make any link between learning outcomes and the skills/competences that they could offer an employer. Even where they had been provided with CV writing guidance this link had not been made, nor had the simple benefits they would gain by using such language and demonstrating the competences they had gained from their studies been pointed out.

In terms of their studies, there was little perceived link to workload from the credits allocated to a unit of study. Some students did know what the norm should be (28 hours per credit being often quoted) but few felt this was in any sense realistic. Most felt that the workload demanded of them was less than that quoted. However, there was a general feeling that the smaller the credit allocation was, the heavier the workload/credit required to achieve the learning outcomes was (in their terminology 'to pass'). All institutions operated a post learning review in one form or another; this varied from the very tightly prescribed in terms of scheduling, analysis of responses and feedback to rather haphazard process and follow up, with all shades of process in between. All students felt that if their views were sought (which they were) then there should be some clear line of follow up – analysis of returns, discussion of the data, action plan, action and communication of what had happened and why. Once again the extent of this line of action being in place varied greatly – at one end of the spectrum staff was replaced if the feedback and data was very negative, at the other no action appeared to be taken or follow up communication made.

- Impact of the National Qualifications Framework and ECTS

In particular management and senior staff with management experience, or duties, acknowledged the impact that the introduction of their national framework had made. The link to ECTS in terms of programme structure and profile was also acknowledged. However, those engaged in the teaching did not often see this – of course if the university regulations required a certain format then that in reality is enough (and often this was the case).

The Frameworks had been, without exception, a catalyst for change in terms of levels, outcomes (the Dublin Descriptors were often cited as being a significant agent of change), and, of course, creating a fundamental and often fraught change to a 3 cycle system with the consequences of this still reverberating around some country systems.

- Impact of Tuning

Senior management at all institutions were aware of Tuning, some simply because of having received the documents for the initial approach and others because of involvement over the years with projects or having attended conferences. Staff who had already undertaken the on-line survey had some awareness of Tuning as did those who had been involved in projects, however, others were not aware of the process. Students were unaware of the process, as they were largely unaware of the learning outcomes approach.

There was little brand awareness of Tuning, but where there was awareness and where there had been participation in projects there was great brand loyalty, much more so to Tuning than to any passing knowledge of the learning outcomes approach.

- Disconnect

This term has become the by-word for the overall findings of the research (a stronger version than 'gap' from TRENDS III, see above). By the term is meant the inability to have, throughout the tiers of a higher education institution (and indeed beyond that throughout the European Higher Education Area), a consistent awareness let alone 'buy-in' and adherence to the learning outcomes approach. Given that this is a core element of ECTS, of Frameworks and the European Standards and Guidelines, this has to be both disappointing and indeed a shock and a wake-up call.

## Examples of good practice

On the basis of the visits the team has been able to identify a number of good practices that are relevant to the whole sector. Each institution had examples of good practice but not one was exemplary. Nevertheless, from these instances it proved to be possible to aggregate cognate areas and thus produce the following list:

- a) A well-defined university policy on learning, teaching and assessment in accordance with the mission of the institution. However, this policy must be put into action right through the institution. Having the policy is not sufficient, the institution has to be sure that there is wide acceptance and, indeed, 'buy in' to the policy and the action resulting from it. The need for good communication is essential to ensure that all stakeholders are involved, aware and committed to the actions.

It can be noted that where a clear policy has been defined and followed through there is a shift of paradigm underway, however, even in these institu-

tions this remains patchy at implementation levels. This means that constant attention to the policy implementation is required for continuing development and success.

- b) Some universities are working with fixed templates for describing the curriculum as well as its modules and units. These require statements of the profiling of the programme and its learning outcomes as well as the learning outcomes for individual units, plus the learning and teaching methods and the forms of assessment. It is crucial that these are shared with potential as well as actual students. In the set up phase it is essential that these are viewed by the staff as something more than just a 'tick box administrative task' but as an integral part of the curriculum development owned by the staff who develop them and then facilitate the, hopefully, aligned learning.
- c) Staff development is an essential component for enhancing study programmes and their delivery that will meet the needs of all stakeholders (both internal to the university and its students as well as external, for example employers and professional organisations). Staff development can have many different forms. What seemed to work best was a central policy underpinned by central funding, the actual staff (who took part in training, advising, mentoring, supporting) was based in a central unit but with well organised and defined links to individual departments, faculties etc. The staff, of course, should be well versed in the paradigm shift taking place and able to communicate this whilst fully understanding the university policies and their place within the wider world. Staff often acted as the ambassadors for the university in national and regional bodies and activities.

Decentralised models do exist and where there was alignment with university policies and excellent internal communications with some central coordination they too did work effectively. Activities that these models might deliver include: international staff mobility, courses, workshops, peer mentoring, continual professional development, learning gatherings (often 'learning lunches'), team building, allotting credits to activities to enable staff to accumulate credit to achieve a qualification etc.

- d) With activities such as curriculum development the building of Teams (including staff, students, central staff development representative, employers, professional body representatives etc.) to take responsibility for defining, organising, implementing and delivering the learning in all of its aspects. This ensures collegial 'buy in'.
- e) Structured links to employment and the world of work, including: alumni tracking, visiting lecturers, CV coaching, staff communication on learning outcomes, competences and professional standards, relations

with employers, internships/placements, entrepreneurship labs etc. All of these assist the students to understand their place within their studies and how to best present themselves when applying for internships/ placements, jobs, further studies.

- f) National initiatives – these can provide impetus and re-launch the conversation about the paradigm shift. New initiatives are needed on a regular basis because otherwise other new ideas push the ‘older’ ones down the memory and institutional/personal priorities. Such initiatives have included: centres of excellence, ‘lecturer of the year’, ‘best university’ etc.

## In conclusion

The findings in the inner but in particular in the outer instruments, the surveys and site visits respectively allow for rather tough conclusions. These are not much different for the EU and the USA.

One of the most disturbing conclusions is there is insufficient consistency in the terminology used referring to the student-centred approach. This leads to confusion in its implementation, and undermines the level of application; The distinction between learning outcomes, ‘what a student knows and is able to do’, and the outcomes of a learning process, the overall change, maturation, and development that an individual personally gains, needs to be better understood by all involved.

It is fair to conclude that the discourse about the shift of paradigm is taking place to various degrees, amongst management and to a lesser extent staff, but much less amongst students. The outcomes show that teaching staff are struggling to adjust to the new concepts and paradigm shift and are challenged by no longer being the “knowledge owners” but rather learning facilitators. This does not come as a surprise because in particular the site visits have showed us that the vast majority of staff members are not trained for higher education teaching. Staff development, where it takes place, is too focused on process, rather than on the concepts and benefits of a learning outcomes approach. Teaching staff are not yet adjusting well to close cooperation with their colleagues, that is operation as and in teams, when writing programme and module/unit learning outcomes and developing learning activities. Institutions and systems are still caught between the research excellence objective (i.e. rankings) and the policy drivers to achieve teaching/learning excellence.

While good practices implementing the student-centred approach emerge in many parts of many higher education institutions all over Europe, there are too few initiatives to scale up these good practices; From the interviews it can be digested that in all cases, good practices are based on external stimuli via partic-

ipation in relevant initiatives such as ECTS implementation and its alignment to learning, Tuning, Thematic Network Programmes, trans-national integrated programmes/ joint degrees in Europe.

Although good practices were identified in the study, the actual implementation of the student-centred approach is indeed not proceeding beyond a discourse on the paradigm shift. There is no certainty that the paradigm shift will be achieved and, without additional and continued support, it could fail. The research also shows that there is a worrying disconnect in terms of the rhetoric, political ambitions and reality between the various tiers of the higher education sector, ranging from Ministers to students, regarding the actual penetration of the student-centred approach and the education experience of the students.

There has been a failure to engage with and convince academic staff about the necessity and advantages of this paradigm shift. Many initiatives have been taken in terms of national and international cooperation but have not received the endorsement and support required by the political policy makers. Seed corn funding has proven to be of help in the launch of relevant activities but a long-term commitment is the only way to achieve changes of this magnitude across such a broad spectrum of higher education systems. The level of time and investment needed to meet the objectives are not to be underestimated: this process of modernisation is effort-intensive, which is difficult for already overburdened staff. Institutions must take ownership of good practice if it is to be embedded and taken forward.

It has been underestimated by all involved in the process how crucial a commitment to staff training and development is. It must be remembered that most staff in higher education have had no pedagogic/andragogic education and training – most staff are indeed ‘driving without a licence’, they base their own teaching on their own experiences as a student. The world has changed but not – in the vast majority of countries and cases the training for life as a university academic involved in facilitating learning and then assessing the achievement of the learning outcomes. What came as a shock was that many ‘trainers/professionals’ interviewed were actually themselves still operating in, and indeed wedded to, the old paradigm of expert driven delivery. Many institutions proved not to have any form of a well working Staff Development Unit with a focus on the new paradigm and all that it entails, including the many benefits to both staff and students. If this is not remedied the future looks bleak. However, any such Units must be positive, well informed, truly engaged and truly serve the needs of the staff and their students in line with institutional policies. They must not be perceived as a ‘side show’. Recognition of such a Unit’s value and ability to enhance and add value to the learning is vital. Success without these factors is unlikely. Full engagement by all actors is a *sine qua non* for success.

Without engaging students and employers in programme design, implementation, delivery and quality assurance there will not be the required level of progress. Good initiatives in this respect are there, but it is a patchwork rather than all pervasive.

Given the financial situation, students show, for obvious reasons, concern about their future role in society. What they observe is a flexible labour market in which they are expected to demonstrate a sufficiently wide range of general competences and where possible some work experience. They know they need subject specific knowledge and skills but do also desire the wider outcomes of learning. In today's ever changing job market and challenged society it is of crucial importance to involve employers and societal leaders in the educational process, if possible in a structured way. They should be seen as advisers in this process, not decision makers in what should be taught and learnt, something which is a collective responsibility but must have at its core the academic staff. Nevertheless, their involvement as guest lecturers and placement/internship providers adds great value. Many institutions have already recognised this and taken appropriate steps in that direction.





## 9. Columbus' Egg? Qualifications Frameworks, Sectoral Profiles and Degree Programme Profiles in Higher Education <sup>652</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*During the last 30 years international mobility, triggered by the ERASMUS Programme, has become paramount in higher education. The European Commission, national authorities and higher education institutions have set-up effective structures to facilitate and implement this process. It has become part of a higher education modernisation process which obtained a serious push with the start and development of the Bologna Process in Europe as of 1999. However the same authorities have been far less active in finding answers on how to facilitate this process in terms of curriculum development, quality assurance and recognition. The initiative was largely left to individuals supported by their employing organizations. Their efforts have led to competence and learning outcomes based descriptors for meta-qualifications frameworks and to important reference points/ meta profiles for subject areas. Academics have been strongly involved in developing the latter and by doing so have offered a more sustainable basis for implementing reforms based on the student-centred approach, which is so relevant for today's world in terms of employability and citizenship. Recently Tuning sectoral qualifications frameworks and aligned subject area based frameworks have been developed, which allow for bridging the two European meta-frameworks, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), with sectoral and degree profiles. This can be seen as a breakthrough initiative because it offers us a transparent model which is developed and owned by academics and can easily be used by all involved in programme design and development, quality enhancement and assurance and recognition of (periods of) studies. It also allows for finally solving the issue of identifying sub-levels within cycles. This was an issue the ECTS developers struggled with continuously, particularly when it was changed from a transfer system only into a transfer and accumulation system.*

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<sup>652</sup> This chapter has been published with the same title in the Scopus Indexed *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Issue No.1, October 2013. It has been updated for this book, taking into account recent insights developed in the context of the CALOHEE project 2016-2018 (see chapter 10).

## Introduction

During the last three decades the internationalization of higher education has really taken off with huge numbers of students experiencing cross border education, identifying and meeting their interests and needs in a global environment, as well as having an international experience. It might be seen on the one hand as a spin-off of the massification of higher education, which developed since the 1960s, and of the internationalization of the labour market on the other. In a relatively short period a non-structured form of free transnational movement of individuals has transferred into a well-structured industry. Probably there is no equal in the history of higher education in which so many new jobs, based on new skills and competences, were created in such a short period, not only at institutional but also at national and international level. Academic staff, who, at first, played a central role in organizing student-mobility in and between cycles, was in no time replaced by 'real professionals'. The explosion in the numbers of students' mobility forced such a development, but also followed the notion that 'overseas students' could be experienced as a very serious and in many cases crucial source of income: international students as a panacea for growth and budget balance. At the same time one may observe that mobility – although rewarding for individual institutions and countries – has very often been costly for the individual learner due to a lack of structures and related tools to accompany this process. It has been well documented that the internationalization of higher education has often prolonged the formal periods of study unnecessarily and that recognition of learning abroad had its serious flaws. This relates, for example, to the recognition of mobility periods but also to three and four-year bachelor programmes and the transfer from cycle to cycle. A recent report shows us that still at least one quarter of European students do not receive full credit for their studies taken abroad.<sup>653</sup> Therefore the (academic) debate about the 'quality' of internationalization was paramount from its very start.<sup>654</sup> It is, however,

<sup>653</sup> Erasmus Student Network (ESN), "Problems of Recognition in Making Erasmus 2010 (Prime 2010). Final Report. Public Part," Brussels: Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, Education and Culture DG, European Commission, 2011. Retrieved from: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/project\\_reports/documents/erasmus/accompanying\\_measures\\_2010/era\\_am\\_177245.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/project_reports/documents/erasmus/accompanying_measures_2010/era_am_177245.pdf).

<sup>654</sup> Jeliaskova, Margarita and Don F. Westerheijden, Systematic Adaptation to a Changing Environment: Towards a Next Generation of Quality Assurance Models, in: *Higher Education*. Vol. 44, No. 3-4, 2002, pp. 433-48; Jane Knight, and Hans de Wit, *Quality and Internationalisation of Higher Education* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 1999); Dirk Van Damme, "Internationalization and Quality Assurance: Towards Worldwide Accreditation?" Paper commissioned for the IAUP XIIth Triennial Conference, Brussels, 11-14 July 1999; Adinda van Gaalen, "Internationalisation and Quality Assurance," in *EAIE Professional Development Series for International Educators, Volume 4*, Amsterdam: European Association for International Education (EAIE), 2010; Marijk C. Van der Wende, and Don F. Westerheijden, International Aspects of Quality Assurance with a Special Focus on European Higher Education, *Quality in Higher Education*. Vol. 7, No. 3, 2001, pp. 233-45;

remarkable that this debate has not been related directly to the lack of involvement of academics and the professionalization of the internationalization agenda.

The question raised here is whether qualifications frameworks, sectoral profiles or frameworks – besides degree programme profiles or reference points – are indispensable instruments for national and international higher education in the world of today. Is this Columbus' Egg to be used by content experts to facilitate recognition, programme design and delivery and quality assurance and quality enhancement? It is noticed in this respect that public authorities in general – although successfully responding to the growth of international education – have been slow in developing effective structures for organizing and guaranteeing the recognition of studies taken in another country and at another institution – both at degree level and in terms of mobility periods, at national as well as international level. This also applies to programme design and quality enhancement in Europe and in other regions in the world. This is actually an important observation, given the interest of countries in having a well-educated labour force, based on state of the art and officially recognized degrees taken at home or abroad. In practice, not public authorities – as might be expected – but rather groups of individuals supported often by institutionalized organizations that took decisive initiatives to fill the gap. This article intends to show that this state of affairs had its advantages and its disadvantages. It will also be observed that much relevant work has been done by many, and that substantial progress has been made but in particular outside the formal structures by projects, etc.

This chapter concentrates on developments in Europe, because these have been a catalyst and stimulus for relevant initiatives elsewhere in the world. As stated, important steps have been made over time. Many organizations and initiatives played a role in this respect such as the Bologna Follow-up Group, the European Commission, ESIB/ESU, EUA and EURASHE, the Council of Europe, the ENIC-NARICS, ENQA, the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI) – initiator of the so-called Dublin Descriptors – and the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project. It was the Tuning initiative, launched in 2000, which gave academics back their voice in the theatre of the modernisation and internationalization of higher education by focusing on the content and role of education in realizing the Bologna Declaration.

Just as a reminder, besides important initiatives at national level, such as the development of national qualifications frameworks in Ireland and Denmark, the Quality Assurance Agency benchmark statements in Britain, the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI), Tuning, EU Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs) and the European Commission should be singled out here, because they had the largest

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and Frans A. van Vught, and Don. F. Westerheijden, "Towards a General Model of Quality Assessment in Higher Education," *Higher Education*. Vol. 28, No. 3, 1994, pp. 355-71.

impact at structural level internationally, as will be discussed below. 'Structural level' means here the framing of higher education in its international perspective to facilitate recognition of degrees and periods of studies: the formulation of descriptors for the three cycles (bachelor, master and doctorate) and the associated degree or short cycle in HE, and the development of reference points at subject area level, which later gave birth to Meta Qualifications frameworks and – in the context of the Tuning initiative – Meta-Profiles and Sectoral Frameworks.

## Change of paradigm

In retrospect, the years 2002 and 2003 can be seen as the most crucial years in the modernisation and internationalization of European higher education. All major decisions and directions were taken and laid down in that period. Quite influential international 'Bologna seminars' took place during those years, of which the conclusions were recorded in the Berlin Communiqué, "Realizing the European Higher Education Area" (19 September 2003). The development of an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and the elaboration of an overarching framework of qualifications were included as means to create one European Higher Education Area. But even more crucial was the inclusion in the Communiqué of the paragraph: "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";<sup>655</sup> followed by "They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area",<sup>656</sup> as well as a number of Bologna (related) conferences. Furthermore, it was stipulated that '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.'<sup>657</sup>

By focusing explicitly on *workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile*, the ministers in practice announced a change of paradigm regarding the

<sup>655</sup> Berlin Communiqué 2003 – 'Realising the European Higher Education Area': Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003 [Berlin Communiqué]." Berlin: Bologna-Berlin2003 Project Team, 2003. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100938/ministerial-conference-berlin-2003.html>

<sup>656</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>657</sup> Idem.

design and delivery of degree programmes. By including this statement, which in effect was inspired by the Tuning project, politics intervened clearly – probably without realizing it – in the prime responsibilities of higher education institutions and their teaching staff by making the switch from *what* should be learned, to *how* it should be learned. At that time the focus was still on teaching rather than on learning. Who had heard then of input versus output based teaching and learning or staff centred versus student oriented teaching and learning? For obvious reasons in the Communiqué a reference is made by the ministers to “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.” A crucial statement, which has proven mainly to be paying lip service in the years that followed. Only six years later in the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué a clear reference was made again to the important role of the higher education institutions and their staff in implementing the reforms. However, again the statement was not accommodated by a plan of action to link up with the higher education institutions.<sup>658</sup>

The Bologna follow-up group, which was installed to stimulate and monitor progress of the Bologna Process, never got directly in touch with initiatives to develop models/methodologies/ approaches to implement the – very costly – change of paradigm announced in Berlin. Instead, it was the European Commission that decided to support a very relevant initiative from the academic world by co-financing the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project and by inviting the Thematic Network Programme (also co-financed by the EC) to take the Tuning approach on board. Other European networks, in particular Engineering, decided to go down that road independently. Officials of the Directorate General Education and Culture, of which David Coyne and Peter van der Hijden should be singled out, were instrumental here. They, more than others involved in the process, saw the implications and potential of the Berlin Communiqué. This is remarkable given the fact that before the Berlin summit, two important Bologna seminars took place, which directed the steps set in Berlin by the ministers. Number one was named *Working on the European Dimension of Quality* (Amsterdam, 12-13 March, 2002) and the second *Qualifications Structures in European Higher Education* (København, 27 – 28 March, 2003).

The first one was an initiative of government officials of Flanders and the Netherlands, in particular of Marlies Leegwater and Noël Vercruyse. This sem-

<sup>658</sup> Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009 – ‘The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade’. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009: Retrieved from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101040/ministerial-conference-leuven-louvain-neuve-2009.html>

inar fitted well in the discussion about quality management and quality assurance regarding national and international education which had developed since the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>659</sup> This seminar was based on the work of an *informal network* which was initiated by individuals after the Prague Bologna summit in 2001, the so-called *Joint Quality Initiative* (JQI). This group consisted of individual government officials and representatives of quality assurance organisations, mainly from the Northern part of Europe. The JQI was originally intended to be a network focusing on quality assurance and accreditation in relation to the bachelor and master programmes in Europe. At a later stage it also covered the short cycle or associated degree and the doctorate. Its contribution is the definition of descriptors for the higher education cycles, which became known as the *Dublin Descriptors*. These were developed between 2001 and 2004 and somewhat later were used as the basis for the *Qualifications Framework for the EHEA* which was endorsed by the ministers of education in 2005 at the Bergen Bologna summit. The importance of this initiative cannot be stressed enough. The initiators understood perfectly well that a systematic approach was the only way forward to make 'Bologna' successful by phrasing the descriptors in terms of expected/required outcomes the group revolutionised the discussion about the modernisation of higher education in Europe. In practice they transferred a debate, which had slowly developed in a number of northern European countries, into a European one.<sup>660</sup> The JQI activities took place simultaneously with the development of the Tuning initiative.

## Amsterdam consensus and the Tuning contribution

At the Amsterdam Bologna seminar of March 2002 it was concluded that general descriptors for the different cycles and reference points at subject area

<sup>659</sup> Carolyn Campbell, and Marijk van der Wende, "International Initiatives and Trends in Quality Assurance for European Higher Education. Exploratory Trend Report," Helsinki: European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2000. Retrieved from: <http://www.enqa.eu/files/initiatives.pdf>; Lee Harvey, and Diana Green, "Defining Quality," *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 18, no. 1, 1993, 9-34; Dirk Van Damme, "Trends and Models in International Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education in Relation to Trade in Education Services," a paper presented at the OECD/ US Forum on Trade in Educational Services, Washington, D.C., 23-24 May 2002. Retrieved from: [http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/upravljajnekvalitetom/pdf/docsmjernice/oecd\\_trends\\_and\\_models.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/upravljajnekvalitetom/pdf/docsmjernice/oecd_trends_and_models.pdf); and Frans A. van Vught, and Don. F. Westerheijden, *Quality Management and Quality Assurance in European Higher Education: Methods and Mechanisms*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the Commission of the European Communities, 1993.

<sup>660</sup> Marlies Leegwater, *Joint Quality Initiative – the origin of the Dublin Descriptors – short history*. The Hague, June 2015. Retrieved on 8 July 2018 from: <http://ecahe.eu/assets/uploads/2016/01/Joint-Quality-Initiative-the-origin-of-the-Dublin-descriptors-short-history.pdf>

level as developed by Tuning should go hand in hand. Its conclusion was far reaching in directing the Bologna Process:

'There is a widely-shared consensus that the 'Dublin Descriptors', defining key outcomes for Bachelors and Masters programmes in general (...) are useful. These generic descriptors are complementary to the more specific outcomes of the Tuning project (,,,), which have been developed at the level of areas of knowledge ('disciplines') In other words, the 'Dublin Descriptors' need to be 'tuned'. Moreover Tuning project outcomes are not to be taken as prescriptive. In that respect, it should be remembered that outcomes do not define curricula.(...)The approach to quality building on a combination of the 'Dublin Descriptors' and Tuning project outcomes apply to 'traditional' delivery of higher education as well as to transnational education, distance education, etc.'<sup>661</sup>

It was also concluded at the conference that "Gains from the Tuning project further include that there is a broader than expected consensus among European higher education institutions on descriptors of their programmes, starting from outcomes rather than starting from curriculum inputs and elements. At the same time, there is less than expected diversity regarding length/credits of programmes." We will come back to these statements below.

It is worth noting that related to the above, an important discussion arose in Amsterdam about the relative value of programme versus institutional approaches to quality assurance: 'Both are important, was the general view. The 'Dublin Descriptors' as well as the Tuning project outcomes are directed primarily at programme level approaches. Many, including expressly the student representatives, gave programme level quality assessment as the priority for public policy, *inter alia* because this would give more direct assurance of quality ('consumer protection'). Institutional quality assurance was mostly seen as the responsibility of autonomous, well-managed higher education institutions, even though some participants voiced the opinion that with 'mass' or 'universal' higher education, and in the emerging network society, such coherent higher education institutions will become ever rarer.'<sup>662</sup> This 'fear' was no further articulated at the conference.

Twelve months later, in 2003, at the Bologna seminar *Qualifications Structures in European Higher Education*, the discussion continued. At this conference

<sup>661</sup> Don F. Westerheyden, and Marlies Leegwater, "Working on the European Dimension of Quality. Report of the Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education as Part of the Bologna Process, Amsterdam, 12-13 March 2002," Zoetermeer: Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, 2003, 97-98.

<sup>662</sup> Westerheyden, Don F., and Marlies Leegwater, Working on the European Dimension of Quality. Report of the Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education as Part of the Bologna Process, Amsterdam, 12-13 March 2002. Zoetermeer: Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences (The Netherlands), 2003, 98.

the role of the Joint Quality Initiative and Tuning were again highlighted, this time explicitly in relation to the development of a European and National Qualifications Frameworks. The rapporteur of the conference Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe, stipulated correctly that all higher education systems at the time already have their 'qualifications framework' but that these are (mainly if not only) based on input factors and formal characteristics. The innovation to be realized was basing such frameworks on the learning outcomes of the educational process. In his words: "A national qualifications framework is simply a systematic description of an education system's qualifications where all learning achievements are measured and related to each other. A European qualifications framework would amount to an agreement about a common structure or architecture within which different national qualifications could be located". The conference agreed upon a number of important recommendations for the Berlin summit of ministers of education. The most relevant ones are listed here for this chapter:

1. At each appropriate level, qualifications frameworks should seek to describe the qualifications making up the framework in terms of *workload, level, quality, learning outcomes and profile*. An EHEA framework should seek to describe qualifications in generic terms (e.g. as first or second cycle degrees) rather than in terms specific to one or more national systems (e.g. Bachelor or Master);
2. Qualifications frameworks should also seek to describe these qualifications with reference to the objectives or purposes for higher education, in particular with regard to four major purposes of higher education: preparation for the labour market, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic society, personal development and development and maintenance of an advanced knowledge base;
3. Within the overall rules of the qualifications frameworks, individual institutions should have considerable freedom in the design of their programmes. National qualifications frameworks, as well as an EHEA framework, should be designed so as to assist higher education institutions in their curriculum development and design of study programmes. Qualifications frameworks should facilitate the inclusion of interdisciplinary higher education study programmes.<sup>663</sup>

The reader will have noticed that in the Berlin Communiqué *quality* as a descriptor is replaced by *competences*. This is done for an obvious reason, namely that quality does not fit in this context, as being an indicator which encompasses all others.

<sup>663</sup> Bologna Seminar on Qualification Structures in Higher Education in Europe. Recommendations, Copenhagen: Bologna-Berlin2003 Project Team, 2003. Retrieved from: [http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Results\\_copenhagen.pdf](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Results_copenhagen.pdf).



From the day the Bologna Declaration was signed, as has been outlined in previous chapters, a fear was expressed that the Bologna Process would lead to the harmonization of higher education programmes. This opinion was in particular voiced by higher education institutions and (their) academics. Higher education experts like Dirk van Damme confirmed this risk should be perceived as real, the Bologna Process being a governmental process.<sup>664</sup> It was further argument why national officials had a strong preference for applying the term 'convergence' and avoiding 'harmonization'. This remarkable discussion was another reason for taking the Tuning initiative. In the opinion of the Tuning initiators educational structures, degree programmes and the actual teaching and learning process should be the prime responsibility of higher education institutions and their staff. The basic thought was that higher education programmes should allow for diversity, flexibility and individual learning pathways, with full respect for consistency, level and quality. Moreover, the process of (re-)designing curricula should lead to programmes which would better match the needs of the labour market and society. The outcomes of Tuning and other surveys as discussed in chapter 6, *Output versus input*, should offer a good indicator in this respect. To assist in designing new programmes and re-designing and enhancing existing ones, the Tuning ten-step approach was developed which was discussed already in chapter 7. The first three steps are of particular relevance here: 1. determine the need for and potential of the degree programme by consulting stakeholders (academic experts, employers, graduates and professional organisations) and deciding whether the programme proposed will satisfy actual professional and/or social demands; 2. define the profile and key programme competences of the programme by defining the body of knowledge, the focus and orientation, identifying the employment sectors and its contribution to developing citizenship and personal culture; 3. formulation of the programme learning outcomes.<sup>665</sup>

A condition for profiling of degree programmes is that there should be an agreed (preferably internationally) reference framework available that consists of sets of common points of reference. These frameworks are important as a means to decide whether a degree programme meets the minimum quality standards and therefore deserves to be accredited. Reference points make provision for diversity, freedom/flexibility and autonomy, and allow higher education institutions to focus on their mission, position and role in the higher education environment. While some universities want to position themselves as international

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<sup>664</sup> Van Damme, Dirk, *European Quality Assurance: Development and Challenges*. Power Point Presentation, 15 November 2001. Brussels: Steering Committee of Tuning Project, Brussels, 2001. Tuning Archive.

<sup>665</sup> Jenneke Lokhoff et al., eds., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles*. Bilbao, Groningen, and The Hague: University of Deusto, 2010.

players, other may prefer to focus on their national and/or regional and/or local role. Also being research or more applied in orientation is of relevance. From 2007, Tuning published its *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes*.<sup>666</sup> Provisional documents were published in 2005. As was already mentioned, many Thematic Network Programmes also published their Tuning reference points, sometimes within the framework of Tuning, sometimes on their own, but always according to an agreed common format. This format was published in 2005 and contained 6 items: 1. Introduction to the subject area; 2. Degree profile(s); 3. Learning outcomes & Competences – level cycle descriptors; 4. Workload and ECTS; 5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment; and 6. Quality enhancement. Item 2 includes both information about typical degrees offered in the subject area as well as typical occupations held by the graduates in the subject area. These reference-points brochures were validated by committees of independent peers in 2007.<sup>667</sup>

As has been showed, the Tuning reference points are based on the distinction between generic or transferable competences and subject specific ones. Tuning uses the term 'competences' in an all-encompassing way, covering knowledge, skills and wider competences as abilities, responsibilities, and attitudes. Tuning has highlighted the use of generic competences because of its relevance for society, both in terms of employment and citizenship. In its European stakeholders' consultations in 2001 and in 2008 the relevance of this approach was confirmed. The outcomes of consultations in other regions of the world led to comparable outcomes.<sup>668</sup>

In 2008, a consultation based on 7087 responses which were well spread over four stakeholder groups, academics, employers, graduates and students, four competences were ranked highest by all:

- Ability for abstract and analytical thinking, and synthesis of ideas
- Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations
- Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding the profession

Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems

Academics and graduates ranked 'Ability to learn' and 'Stay up-to-date with learning' as number five, while employers and students ranked 'Ability to work

<sup>666</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe (Tuning Europe) website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>.

<sup>667</sup> The way in which these reference points within the Tuning context were (further) developed and agreed, is explained in detail by Julia González and Maria Yarosh, Building Degree Profiles. The Tuning Approach, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Issue No. 1, November 2013, 37-69.

<sup>668</sup> Pablo Benitone and Edurne Bartelomé, Global generic competences with local ownership: comparative study from the perspective of graduates in four world regions, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education (THE). Competence-based learning: a global perspective*. Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 43-74/ pp. 303-334.

in teams' as the fifth important competence. Also the 'Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in first language' was thought being very important, although it was ranked lower.

This outcome is relevant when compared to the Dublin descriptors as included in the *Qualifications Framework for the EHEA*: Knowledge and understanding, Applying knowledge and understanding, Making judgments, Communication skills and Learning skills. It shows that the Tuning approach could easily be related to the structure of the QF for the EHEA. It also underlines that the descriptors as developed by the JQI are sensitive ones and that these are indeed complementary to the Tuning approach, both in terms of level descriptors and reference points. Together, they should therefore be applied at degree programme level. This is also what happened in practice, although – depending on the country involved – it has proved to be a slow process.

## European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

When the QF for the EHEA was endorsed at the Bologna summit of ministers in Bergen in 2005, the European Commission had already taken the initiative to develop a *Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* (EQF for LLL), to combine the outcomes of the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Process for Vocational, Education and Training (VET) launched in 2002. Experts from both the Higher Education sector and the VET sector were involved in designing this framework, although the VET sector was the prime authority in the process. This was probably due to the fact that the higher education sector already had its own Qualifications Framework. After intense discussions it was agreed to make a distinction between three types of descriptors: knowledge, skills and wider competences. While the QF for EHEA has stand-alone descriptors, it was decided that the EQF for Lifelong Learning descriptors would have a structure of 8 levels and be cumulative, where a level builds on the previous level. In 2008 the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers passed its *Recommendation on the establishment of an EQF for lifelong learning*.<sup>669</sup> The member states were invited to create their National Qualifications Framework based on the EQF features, and sectors were called upon to develop Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks. This challenge was taken up by Tuning in 2008. It had numerous reasons to do so.

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<sup>669</sup> European Commission, Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. (2008/C 111/01). Official Journal of the European Union 6.5.2008. Retrieved on 10 July 2018 from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008H0506\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008H0506(01)&from=EN)

But before linking this development to Tuning, it is important to have a closer look at the definitions of skills and competences being used in the EQF for Lifelong Learning 2008 version. 'Skills' means in EQF terms "the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. They are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)." By "competence" is meant "the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development". However, it is added that in the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of 'responsibility' and 'autonomy'.<sup>670</sup> As in the case of Tuning – an encompassing definition of competences is used. It is, however, problematic that in the final version the Directorate General of Education and Culture decided to remove 'wider' as a crucial addition to the label descriptor 'competence'. By doing so, it created a contradiction in terms. This was confirmed by Mike Coles (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, London), the main author of the framework, in 2012.<sup>671</sup> It is also contrary to other European Commission actions where the notion of key competences is flagged. For example the *European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* adopted in 2006: "It identifies and defines the key abilities and knowledge that everyone needs in order to achieve employment, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship in today's rapidly-changing world." It is no wonder that the EQF initially lead to confusion in particular in the higher education sector.<sup>672</sup> In January 2018 the Commission published its proposal to update the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.<sup>673</sup> This shows topicality of the issue.

<sup>670</sup> European Commission, *European Qualifications Framework (EQF)*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008. Retrieved on 10 July 2018 from: [http://ecompetences.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/EQF\\_broch\\_2008\\_en.pdf](http://ecompetences.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/EQF_broch_2008_en.pdf)

<sup>671</sup> Discussed by the author with Coles in the autumn of 2012.

<sup>672</sup> European Commission, *Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)*. Official Journal of the European Union 30.12.2006. Retrieved on 10 July 2018 from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32006H0962&from=EN>

<sup>673</sup> European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document. Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning {COM(2018) 24 final}* Brussels, 17.1.2018. The 2006 edition distinguishes 8 key competences, the new proposal also includes 8 key competences : Literacy competence; Languages competence; Science, technological, engineering and mathematical competence; Digital competence; Personal, social and learning competence; Civic competence; Entrepreneurship competence; and Cultural awareness and expression competence. The 2006 edition identified the following eight key competences: Communication in the mother tongue; Communication in foreign languages; Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; Digital competence; Learning to learn; Social and civic competences; Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and Cultural awareness and expression.

## Tuning sectoral qualifications reference frameworks or profiles

Although the Bologna Follow-Up Group concludes after comparing the two systems that these are compatible, in reality this is not quite true. Not only is the QF for the EHEA ECTS-credit based and the other one is not, it is also constructed on the basis of a different philosophy. The Tuning experts' group is, as a result, faced with a number of issues: two competing frameworks for the Higher education sector, one based on stand-alone descriptors and the other one on cumulative descriptors and the challenge to bridge the two overarching qualifications frameworks and the Tuning reference points or meta-profiles at subject area level. From this challenge the idea was born in 2007 that a solution might be found in developing sectoral qualifications reference frameworks as an intermediate between the subject area level and the meta-level. This would require a grouping of academic programmes in terms of domains or sectors. A sector or domain to be understood here as a combination of related fields of study which are based on more or less comparable learning profiles. Not surprisingly five to six sectors are distinguished: Humanities and the Creative and Performing Disciplines, Engineering, Natural Sciences, Health Care and Social Sciences. The order used here is based on the mutual relationship between the sectors and can be visualized as follows:



From 2008 to 2010 a first project was implemented, to develop a Tuning Sector Qualifications Framework for the Social Sciences. In the project the sector is represented by the following subject areas: Business Studies, European Studies, Education Sciences, Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Law, Psychology and International Relations. The project designed a framework which not only

covered the higher education sector, that is the levels 5 to 8 (short cycle degree, Ba, Ma and doctorate) of the EQF, but also the levels 3 and 4 (being the entrance level to higher education/ secondary education and vocational education and training). This framework can be seen as being pioneering and innovative, but most of all a major step forward to bridge the different initiatives so far. The approach of developing the framework by using the strategy of reflection, debate and consultation is well described in the final report of the project. The project itself highlights the fact that it struggled (initially) with the division between skills and (wider) competences. This is reflected in its outcomes.<sup>674</sup> We will come back to this.

The project as such was challenging. Not only would it combine the reference points which were prepared for the different subject areas during a painstaking process, it also would relate them to the principles of the EQF for Lifelong Learning with full respect for the Descriptors of the QF for the EHEA. The outcome of this process was twofold: a definition of a short profile for the sector and the aligned matrixes of expected levels of achievement – based on the three EQF descriptors knowledge, skills and wider competences – defined for each level. The well-formulated profile offers insight in what the sector stands for and how it distinguishes itself from other sectors:

‘The social sciences are concerned with the study of and the provision of services to society as articulated in individuals, groups and communities. They examine social structures and organizations (economic, legal, cultural, religious, political, etc.) in both space and time. They explore the dynamic processes and inter-relationships between them and how different meaning and attitudes are created and have to be negotiated. Their scope ranges from the minutiae of human behaviour and development to large scale social movements. Social Sciences have a strong ethical dimension related to social justice, wellbeing, cohesion and citizenship.’<sup>675</sup>

The profile as such shows the potential of this approach. When Tuning developed the sectoral philosophy – as a preparation for Sectoral Qualifications Framework-projects – it assumed that students move mostly within one sector or between two related sectors. This implies that recognition issues are also relating to this scope. As an example the subject area of History might serve well. Positioned in Humanities it has clear relations with Social Sciences and vice versa. This is reflected in the matrixes of learning outcomes for the different

<sup>674</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning SQF for the Social Sciences. Final Report 2008-2010*. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/tuning-sqf-social-sciences.html>.

<sup>675</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning SQF for the Social Sciences. Final Report*. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/tuning-sqf-social-sciences.html>.

levels which not only offer reference points for the disciplines covered by the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Social Sciences, but also for related academic fields. However, there is a weakness in the approach taken by the Social Sciences Sectoral Qualifications Framework project. It kept close to the cumulative approach of the EQF for Lifelong Learning. One of the consequences of this approach is that the learning outcomes statements at level 7 must be read in conjunction with those defined for the levels 5 and 6. A result of this approach was that learning outcomes statements for the descriptors of wider competences at level 8 were not thought necessary, because they were already covered by lower levels. An issue here is that the learning outcomes identified for the levels 7 and 8 covering knowledge and skills are phrased in a rather open way, and require that the expected achievement levels 5 and 6 are taken into account as well in order to understand what is actually covered in hard fact. By linking different types of knowledge and awareness to neutral phrases like 'a specialist area or specific field of study or practice' they can be used for every sector independent of the discipline/ field of study covered. This seems unavoidable in this set up because at those levels the sector tends to encompass a wide range of specializations taught, learned and assessed in the many academic fields covered.

The key problem with cumulative descriptors which define expected levels of performance is that this approach makes the process of recognition of periods of studies based on the competences obtained and the learning outcomes achieved a very complex one and, therefore, it becomes the work of specialists. They are simply too difficult to handle and therefore to apply. This implies that academics, although expected to develop and to work with competence statements and programme and module learning outcomes, are not well served when it comes to the recognition of learning. This is not beneficial because, in the last resort, Boards of Examiners that consist of academics and individual professors usually have the final say in matters of recognition at institutions. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that the instruments which facilitate (inter)national mobility and recognition are owned by the academic staff and used on a daily basis. It seems to be the only reasonable way to convince academics to develop an open mind regarding learning that has been obtained elsewhere. Tuning and Thematic Networks have shown us that trust and confidence is strengthened considerably when academics have a chance to learn to appreciate each other in open dialogue about their field of study.

This was strongly kept in mind when in 2010 the Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Framework HUMART project took over the banner from the Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Framework Social Sciences project. HUMART stands for *Humanities and the Performing and Creative Arts*. Although it was realized when defining the project that the definition of Humanities commonly includes visual and performing arts, based on experience so far, it was thought that it might not

be feasible and helpful to include subject areas involved in a single reference framework. Therefore, the option was kept open to develop two reference frameworks, one for the Humanities and one for the Performing and Creative Disciplines.

The main objective of HUMART was largely comparable to the one of the Social Sciences: to develop an easily readable sectoral qualifications reference framework which would be defined and owned by academics. It should be consistent and be based on stand-alone descriptors in order to bridge the two existing European overarching frameworks. A three-step approach was applied. A first step was to re-phrase and re-order the existing sets of the subject area descriptors for the Bologna three cycles on the basis of the EQF for Lifelong Learning. This applied to history, visual and performing arts and architecture. Music – also involved – had already made this step at an earlier stage. For Literary Studies, Linguistics, Art History and Theology and Religious Studies reference points were still to be developed at European level. A second step was to compare the descriptors of the subject areas involved. This comparison formed the basis of the final step: to design and define the sectoral qualifications reference framework. When the second phase was applied, it became clear that on the basis of comparison it was greatly preferable to develop two frameworks instead of just one. Two autonomous reference frameworks would do more justice to the character of the two specific sets of subject areas and would therefore be a far better tool for the design and implementation of degree programmes, including quality assurance and enhancement, as well as the recognition of periods of studies, than a single framework.

The Tuning experts in visual arts, theatre, music and architecture underlined this point by defining the following profile for their academic fields:

'The Creative and Performing Disciplines encompass a range of fields of an artistic and technical nature in which creativity, interpretation and aesthetic judgment are paramount. These disciplines involve the invention and generation of ideas, forms, images, sounds, structures, performances and texts, which can be used in experimental development to produce new artefacts, spaces, devices, products or processes. The joint concept of a unified sector radiates a stronger focus upon this innovative potential, which is often insufficiently highlighted when considering the constituent disciplines in isolation. The Creative and Performing Disciplines contribute to the experience of life in ways that complement, and have parity with, the contributions of science, technology and philosophy.'<sup>676</sup>

<sup>676</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010 – 2011 [SQF HUMART Final Report 2010-2011]*. Bilbao: University of Deusto, 2012. Retrieved from: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF\\_HUMART\\_Final\\_Report\\_2010-2011.pdf](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF_HUMART_Final_Report_2010-2011.pdf).



This profile shows clearly the specific nature of the sector within the much wider domain of the Humanities. The reference framework itself is described by the experts involved as 'a bold attempt to produce a common set of statements about expected achievement levels for students in any and all of the disciplines represented: the visual arts, the performing arts, music and architecture'. Inspired by the expert group of Architecture the sector managed to find a common focus and by doing so set itself apart from other sectors. As core characteristic for the sector was identified "Creation & Creativity", which was supported by seven dimensions which offer further identification/specification. Dimensions indicate a constructive key element which defines a subject area. Each subject area is based on a multiple of dimensions. The implication of using a core characteristic and dimensions is twofold: it not only strengthened the identity of the higher arts educational sector in Europe, it also highlighted the innovative potential of the sector. This not only underlined the importance of the sectoral approach in terms of recognition of studies, curriculum development and quality assurance and enhancement but also its capability to act as a coordinated force in more political terms.

This approach was also used by the Humanities disciplines to construct their sectoral qualifications reference framework. For the Humanities for obvious reasons "humanness in culture and society" was identified as its core characteristic or focal point. It was related to 8 dimensions, one more than in the case of the performing and creative disciplines. These dimensions were linked closely to those of the Performing and Creative Disciplines, being a related domain. In the grid below both sets of dimensions are offered. It shows that the central 'values' of each of the sectors are expressed in key terms. Having been drawn up by academics in these sectors, these terms will be recognized by their academic colleagues.

*Table 1: Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks dimension*

Humanities Dimensions	Creative and Performing Disciplines Dimensions	Knowledge	Skills	Wider competences (Autonomy and Responsibility)
The Human Being	Making, Performing, Designing, Conceptualising			
Cultures and Societies	Re-thinking, Considering and interpreting the Human			
Texts and Contexts	Experimenting, innovating & Researching			
Theories and Concepts	Theories, Histories and Cultures			
Interdisciplinarity	Technical, environmental and Contextual issues			
Communication	Communication, Collaboration & Interdisciplinarity			
Initiative and Creativity	Initiative & Enterprise			
Professional Development				

To show how this approach is applicable, the first two dimensions which are typical for each of the two sectors, Creative and Performing Disciplines (CPD) and Humanities (HUM) at level 6 are highlighted.

*Table 2: Relation EQF and Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Framework dimensional approach*

Sector at level 6 EQF	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
EQF	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts</li> <li>• Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups</li> </ul>
CPD: Making, Performing, Designing, Conceptualising	Have advanced knowledge of the processes and concepts underlying creation and/or performance in their specific discipline	Have the advanced skills necessary to create, realise and express their own creative concepts	Be able to draw upon the knowledge and skills gained within their studies to act and respond creatively in different situations
CPD: Rethinking, Considering and Interpreting the Human	Appreciate how the practice and/or creation generated within their discipline both stems from, and shapes, our humanity	Demonstrate interpretative skill and a reflection of the human dimension in their creative practice	Be able to draw upon experience gained within their studies to operate with an ethical awareness and to encourage the development and foster the well-being of other individuals and groups

Sector at level 6 EQF	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
HUM: Human Being	Have a critical understanding of the human condition, experience and expression in its various forms and environments	Be able to use disciplinary knowledge to understand and interpret contemporary societal challenges	Be able to understand and respect the individual human in his/her personal, cultural and social dimension
HUM: Culture and Societies	Have knowledge and critical insight into how human behaviours, institutions and modes of expression emerge from and interact with ideas, beliefs and values	Be able to draw on knowledge of the relevant field to identify and define, with guidance, significant problems and areas of enquiry with respect to social and cultural interaction	Be aware of the role of humanities and a humanistic perspective in society, and demonstrate an ethical commitment to their use to achieve social cohesion and sustainability

In both Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks the EQF definitions of knowledge, skills and (wider) competences have been followed. In the case of (wider) competences the emphasis has not been explicitly put on personal responsibility and autonomy. One feels the tension between the EQF expressions as managing and decision making, which are more operational than the Sectoral Qualifications Framework expressions which focus much more on taking social responsibility and offer guidance. It shows how difficult it is to use these descriptors in a one dimensional way.

From the scheme above it can be learned that although the two sectors are related, the expected achievements in terms of learning outcomes can be clearly distinguished. This is even more true when these are compared to other sectors, as has been done in the *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes of Higher Education in Europe* (CALOHEE) project (2016-2018) outlined in the next chapter. It shows the advantages of a systematic approach. It can be observed that a sectoral qualifications reference framework has a real added value when the following conditions are met:

The Sectoral Qualifications Framework is:

- identified by the academics working in the sector as being the core of their sector and academic field
- based on a distinctive profile and *dimensions* which grasp the core characteristic of the sector and its underlying disciplines. In other words, a dimension indicates a constructive key element which defines a subject area. Each subject area is based on a multiple of dimensions.

- based on expected levels of achievement/ Learning Outcomes which are formulated as stand-alone descriptors
- preferably limited in size to one page for each level
- formulated in such a way that the descriptors are clear, transparent and easy to read
- formulated in such a way that the expected levels of achievement of each discipline covered by the reference framework can be phrased according to the dimensions identified for the sector

These requirements seem to be met by the two Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks discussed here. They also allow for learning which has been obtained in an informal or non-formal context. In cases of an interdisciplinary programme it might be necessary to take the two related frameworks into account to position the programme in its academic environment.

A next step is the alignment of meta-profiles or reference points at subject area level to the related sectoral ones. Architecture, music, visual and performing arts as well as history have gone through that process successfully in the setting of the Sectoral Qualifications Framework HUMART project given the documents resulting.<sup>677</sup> One can conclude that this has led to better, more precise, reference points than we had until then. This is of relevance again for external quality reviews and degree programme enhancement.

### **Bridging the QF for EHEA and the EQF for LLL**

Both European overarching Qualifications Frameworks are one dimensional if we take the set of descriptors per cycle or level. In the case of the QF of EHEA it was built – for the two first cycles (BA and MA) on the descriptors range Knowledge and understanding, Applying Knowledge and understanding, Judgment, Communication and Learning skills. In the case of the EQF for Lifelong Learning the descriptors Knowledge, Skills, (Wider) Competences (Autonomy and Responsibility) which were named ‘learning domains’. In 2017 the EQF was officially revised on the basis of a new Recommendation and the description of the ‘learning domain’ ‘Competences’ was replaced by ‘Autonomy and Responsibility’. Not a real innovation, because in the 2008 version it was already stated that competences meant to reflect ‘autonomy and responsibility’. The new Recommendation was prepared by the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, and not Education and Culture. This was the

<sup>677</sup> Tuning Europe website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/sqf-humanities-and-arts/outcomes.html>. It offers besides the SQF for the Humanities and the Creative and Performing Arts Subject area descriptors/ reference points documents (conceptual frameworks) for the subject areas Art History, Linguistics, Literary Studies and Theology and Religious Studies.

outcome of a reordering of responsibilities between Directorate Generals of the European Commission in 2014 by its president Jean-Claude Juncker. It confirms that Vocational and Training is perceived as directly related to the world or work. The focus in the EQF for Lifelong Learning is now explicitly on achieving learning outcomes. It is formulated as a framework that 'classifies qualifications according to a set of criteria for specific levels of learning achieved. It aims to integrate and coordinate qualifications, as well as improve the transparency, accessibility and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market, the education and civil society.' A qualification is defined as 'the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards'.<sup>678</sup>

The univariate character of both overarching frameworks is a strength, but also a weakness. The danger is that it simplifies reality and has therefore a limited meaning and value. The basic idea of a Qualifications Framework is that it sets expected or intended levels which should be met, by offering a fair description of the sector/academic field. Therefore, the described Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks of the Creative and Performing Disciplines and of the Humanities, which are based on dimensions is a serious step forward. Such an Sector Qualifications Framework seems to do more justice to the particular features of each sector and the subject areas it contains. The reason for this is that such a reference framework is two-dimensional and offers much more possibilities for deepening the features. This in turn offers better opportunities for measuring the expected level of competences/ learning outcomes. The beauty of having two axes or legs is that it offers a clear structure, without being mechanic.

However, does it actually offer a reliable and feasible answer to the issue of having two competing frameworks for higher education? It seems it does. To demonstrate this, we take the two Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks with the identified 7 and 8 dimensions as a starting point. To make it fit, it is required to re-arrange these dimensions slightly. An 8<sup>th</sup> descriptor is added to the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Performing and Creative Disciplines: professional development. This seems to be an element lacking in the original scheme. The 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors of the QF of EHEA are used to illustrate the model.

Table 3 below shows that it is not at all over complicated to order the dimensions of the two Tuning sectoral qualifications reference frameworks according to the five descriptors of the QF for the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of the EHEA. As will be noticed the first special feature or dimension which offers the Sectoral Qualifications Framework its unique character has been positioned as a sepa-

<sup>678</sup> European Commission, *The European Qualifications Framework: supporting learning, work and cross-border mobility*. 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018, 7-8.

rate descriptor, because it stands out from the other ones as a core characteristic which does not fit into the categories used in the QF for EHEA as it is meant to be overarching. The other categories can easily be related to this framework. It shows the usefulness of further differentiation in dimensions within the broader QF descriptors.

The result is a table which can be completed for each subject area, which results in a Meta profile for that particular academic field, such as music or linguistics. The profile and table can then be used as a basis for describing each degree programme according to the mission of an institution, department and the particular features in terms of its (tailored) programme learning outcomes.

Having the reference framework in place the next step is to move to practical application. By using this approach a transparent model is created, which is easy to operate and to understand by admissions and recognitions officers as well as by academics. This can be illustrated by filling in the table at the level of a degree programme. We use for this exercise the Erasmus Mundus Master Course *Euroculture: Society, Politics and Culture in a Global Context*. This is an interesting example, because *Euroculture* is not only a multi-dimensional programme – having both a research specialisation and a professional specialisation – , it is also clearly an inter-disciplinary one. It intertwines core elements of the academic fields of history, political studies, international law, cultural studies and religious studies. If the model is appropriate for such a complex programme, one might expect that it can be applied to all degree programmes. Although the programme is related to the sectors of Humanities as well as Social Sciences, its centre of gravity is located in the first sector. Using the Humanities dimensions seems, therefore, to be appropriate. The outcome is presented in table 4. It shows a one-page table covering level 7 of the EQF (Masters) which is based on the special feature and the dimensions of the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Humanities.

The table includes a special – encompassing – feature for the Euroculture programme which gives profile to its topic under the heading 'human being'. Key here are the three descriptors included in this dimension. It distinguishes 'deep understanding of the topic' (knowledge), 'identification and problematisation of the topic' (skills) and finally 'analysis and interpretation' (wider competences; autonomy and responsibility. These descriptors – being part of the same dimension – are fully aligned and reflect progression in learning. The main feature is broken down in 7 other dimensions. These dimensions are one to one linked to the five categories of learning of the (Dublin) descriptors as included in the QF for the EHEA. Each of these 7 dimensions, being 'cultures and societies', 'texts and contexts', 'theories and concepts', 'initiative and creativity', 'interdisciplinarity', 'communication' and 'professional development' are shaped again in three

descriptors which show different levels: knowledge, application of knowledge and operationalisation in practical situations. In one general feature and 7 dimensions, formulated in 24 descriptors a comprehensive overview is offered of what the programme represents.

To generalise, Subject Area Based Qualifications Frameworks are meant to serve as a sound basis for defining the *programme learning outcomes* of individual degree programmes of the first and second cycle (BA and MA). Basing the individualized (degree programme) sets of learning outcomes on these frameworks will guarantee that 'standards' which have been agreed and validated internationally are fully respected. It also implies full alignment with the overarching descriptors of the two European Qualifications Frameworks and, consequently, with the National Qualifications Frameworks. By making templates available in WORD format, which allows for accommodating the descriptors for an individual degree programme in which mission and specific profile are taken into account, it becomes easier to prepare high quality learning outcome statements for each programme. This is not only in the interest of all stakeholders, higher education institutions, academic staff and students, Quality Assurance Institutions and other higher education (partner) institutions. It will facilitate recognition of (period of) studies as well as admission procedures.

### **Additional value: identification of sub-levels**

As has been outlined, during the 1990s a discussion developed in the ECTS international counsellor group and beyond, that there was a need to align credits to levels. Given the diversity of the European higher education sector it was not feasible to introduce a system comparable to that of the US, in which credits are related to course units that are coded with level indicators equalling the year of study (100 for year one, 200 for year two, etc.). When it was decided to transform ECTS from a transfer into a transfer and accumulation system and long programmes were divided into two cycle programmes (Bachelor and Master), the urgency increased to find a solution. The introduction of the concept of competences to be developed and to be measured in intended and achieved learning outcomes proved to be a major step forward. The introduction of cycles allowed, as a first step, for linking ECTS credits to either the Bachelor or the Master. However, this did not solve the issue of progressive steps, using course units/ modules as building blocks in a structured way. Different approaches were suggested for sub-levels within cycles, as discussed in chapter 4, *Making the Jump. From a European credit transfer system towards an overarching accumulation system*. It was proposed to differentiate between four levels: basic, intermediate, advanced



and specialised.<sup>679</sup> Fritz Dalichow, one of the main architects of the ECTS, suggested to introduce a ladder of awards, which would allow to link credits to levels.<sup>680</sup> Also the ECTS international counsellors group came up with a proposal.<sup>681</sup> It stressed – as was mentioned in chapter 4 – the urgency of sub-levels in a note prepared by the European University Association for the working group preparing the QF for the EHEA.<sup>682</sup> Particularly, in the Anglo-Saxon world the solution was sought in using the Bloom taxonomy of 1956 and the revised version by Anderson and Krathwohl in 2001. It led to so-called verb wheels or tables, with verbs indicating a level, which could also be linked to learning, teaching and assessment approaches.<sup>683</sup> As has been explained in chapter 7, *Higher education professional staff development and the Tuning approach*, this had its limits, because it was not very reliable in a multi-lingual context. It was argued that for indicating a level, it was also necessary to include information about the ‘type’ of learning, i.e. knowledge, cognitive processes, skills or other competences, the topic, distinguishing between general and specific, plus a *standard or level* and *scope and/or context*. However, at the time a structural solution was not found. It has been now.<sup>684</sup>

As the example of Euroculture shows us, the merger of the EQF for Lifelong Learning and the QF for the EHEA results in a multi-dimensional table of descriptors based on dimensions. Each dimension always holds three ‘learning domains’ which serve as level indicators: knowledge, skills and autonomy and

<sup>679</sup> Robert Wagenaar, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits. In: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 238.

<sup>680</sup> Fritz Dalichow, CATS and EUROCATS. In: *EAIE Forum*. Vol 1. No. 3, Autumn 1999, pp. 5-7.

<sup>681</sup> Report of ECTS National Counsellors Working Group, ECTS. Linking credits and different levels of study. Antwerpen 7-8 February 2003. Tuning Archive. In the proposal 8 ‘levels’ are proposed, for which each of these a descriptor is defined. In the proposal the first cycle should hold 4 levels, the second cycle 2 levels and the third cycle also 2 levels. Tuning Archive.

<sup>682</sup> Recommendation from EUA and the national ECTS counsellors regarding the role of ECTS in the elaboration of a European Qualifications Framework, Brussels, 23 June 2004. Point 11 reads: ‘It also follows that there is a need for a further subdivision of the existing Bologna 3 cycles into “sub-levels” in order to be able to show progression through the higher education system. This is for example, crucial in terms of increasing access which in turn means being able to define attainable goals within shorter periods than those envisaged for first cycle qualifications,...’. Tuning Archive.

<sup>683</sup> Examples of ‘verb wheels’ and tables which indicate level: Bloom’s Taxonomy Action Verbs. Retrieved on 12 July 2018 from: <http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/oie/documents/assesments/Blooms%20Level.pdf>; Bloom’s Taxonomy of Measurable Verbs. Retrieved on 12 July 2018 from: <https://www.utica.edu/academic/Assessment/new/Blooms%20Taxonomy%20-%20Best.pdf>

<sup>684</sup> See Jenneke Lokhoff, et al., *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles. Including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes*. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague, 2010, 44-46.

responsibility (wider competences). These three can be read as 'types of learning' and they involve by definition a standard or level. In the sectoral qualifications reference frameworks developed by Tuning and fine-tuned by the CALOHEE project, 'knowledge' should be perceived as the lowest level, followed by 'skills' – the actual application of knowledge in an academic field and context. Both knowledge and skills are a condition for applying them in practice, which is the highest level of learning of that particular dimension, expressed as 'autonomy and responsibility'. In other words, each dimension involves three levels, for which descriptors are defined, and which build on each other. The descriptors of the different dimensions and their 'learning domains' will also indicate topic and scope and/or context.

These 'dimension related learning domain' descriptors should be recognisable in the learning outcomes of each course unit. This results in a well-structured model that reflects progression of learning for each cycle, and, within a cycle, for each dimension. In CALOHEE the subject area based reference frameworks are supported by assessment reference frameworks (see chapter 10), which in practice are a breakdown of the 'dimension descriptors' into more precise descriptors which can be measured. For this purpose, CALOHEE has developed examples of good practices to learn, teach and assess a dimension and its three 'learning domains' reflecting 'progressive level of achievement'.

*Table 3: Tuning model to bridge the overarching frameworks, QF for the EHEA and the EQF for LLL, on the basis of the Tuning SQF dimensions approach*

QF EHEA 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors 1, 3-5	SQF Performing and Creative Disciplines Level 7	SQF Humanities Level 7	EQF descriptor knowledge Level 7	EQF descriptor skills Level 7	EQF descriptor Wider Competences (Autonomy and Responsibility) Level 7
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research</li> <li>critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches</li> <li>Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</li> </ul>
<i>Special feature SQF</i>	1. Making, Performing, Designing, Conceptualising	1. The Human Being			

QF EHEA 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors 1, 3-5	SOQ Performing and Creative Disciplines Level 7	SOQ Humanities Level 7	EQF descriptor knowledge Level 7	EQF descriptor skills Level 7	EQF descriptor Wider Competences (Autonomy and Responsibility) Level 7
<i>I. Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context</i>	2. Re-thinking, Considering and interpreting the Human 3. Technical, environmental and Contextual issues	2. Cultures and Societies 3. Texts and Contexts			
<i>II. Can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study</i>	4. Theories, Histories and Cultures	4. Theories and Concepts			
<i>III. Have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements</i>	5. Experimenting, innovating & Researching 6. Initiative & Enterprise	5. Initiative and Creativity 6. Inter-disciplinarity			

QF EHEA 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors 1, 3-5	SQF Performing and Creative Disciplines Level 7	SQF Humanities Level 7	EQF descriptor knowledge Level 7	EQF descriptor skills Level 7	EQF descriptor Wider Competences (Autonomy and Responsibility) Level 7
<i>IV. Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously</i>	<b>7. Communication, Collaboration &amp; Interdisciplinarity</b>	<b>7. Communication</b>			
<i>V. Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous</i>	<b>8. Professional Development</b>	<b>8. Professional Development</b>			

*Table 4: TUNING Qualifications Reference Frameworks' General Descriptors of the Master Course EURO CULTURE: Society, Politics and Culture in a Global Context*

QF EHEA 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors	SQF domain dimensions Level 7 (MASTER)	EQF descriptor Knowledge Level 7 – Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research – Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	EQF descriptor Skills Level 7 – Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	EQF descriptor Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences) Level 7 – Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches – Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Special feature degree programme	Human Being	Deep understanding of European identity/is, civil society/ies, the ongoing European unification process in itself, its cultural and social dynamics and the consequences for its citizens and the wider world	Identification and problematisation of what Europe and the EU represents for its citizens and for the wider world	Analysis and interpretation of current issues regarding the handling of multicultural society issues into feasible solutions and transferring this knowledge to relevant audiences
I. Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context	1. Cultures and Societies 2. Texts and Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thorough knowledge and understanding of the phenomena of multiculturalism, national and European identity, current political governance, and evolving social-political processes on the basis of four concepts, namely: Communication, Cooperation, Mobility of Citizens and Active Citizenship;</li> <li>Thorough (historical) understanding of the European integration process in a global perspective by having studied the most relevant texts in context.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level analysing and synthesising competency to identify and problematise issues related to inter-, trans- and multiculturalism;</li> <li>Ability to locate, select from a variety of sources and manage information required for addressing problems related to key issues as identity/ies and civil society/ies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to apply theoretical knowledge into practice by offering context-based guidance and workable and acceptable approaches with a high awareness of sensitivity of the issues at stake;</li> <li>Application of appropriate management skills, such as leadership, decision-making, motivation to work effectively in a multicultural/transnational setting.</li> </ul>

QF EHEA 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors	SQF domain dimensions Level 7 (MASTER)	EQF descriptor Knowledge Level 7 – <i>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research</i> – <i>Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</i>	EQF descriptor Skills Level 7 – <i>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</i>	EQF descriptor Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences) Level 7 – <i>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches</i> – <i>Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</i>
Special feature degree programme	Human Being	<i>Deep understanding of European identity/is, civil society/ies, the ongoing European unification process in itself, its cultural and social dynamics and the consequences for its citizens and the wider world</i>	<i>Identification and problematisation of what Europe and the EU represents for its citizens and for the wider world</i>	<i>Analysis and interpretation of current issues regarding the handling of multicultural society issues into feasible solutions and transferring this knowledge to relevant audiences</i>
II. <i>Can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study</i>	3. Theories and Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thorough knowledge and understanding of theoretical and methodological approaches, in particular comparativism and constructivism, which allow for independent research in the academic field involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to make judgements by integrating complex and (conflicting and insufficient) data with the intention to identify rational and sustainable solutions for identified problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience in and knowledge of planning, designing and managing complicated medium-term (research) projects in a transnational and multicultural environment successfully</li> </ul>

<p>QF EHEA 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors</p>	<p>Special feature degree programme</p>	<p>III. <i>Have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements</i></p>	<p>4. Initiative and Creativity 5. Interdisciplinarity</p>	<p>EQF descriptor Knowledge Level 7 – <i>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research</i> – <i>Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</i></p>	<p>Human Being</p>	<p>• Thorough knowledge and understanding of different regional and national perceptions of the European integration process from a cultural-social perspective including awareness of the push and pull factors in the process of European identity formation and in relation to third countries; • High level of sensitivity based on knowledge and insight regarding cultural-social differences and comparabilities at group, local, regional, national, European and global level.</p>	<p>• Ability to Identify topics in the public debate in a reflexive way and with an eye for social-cultural sensitive matters; Ability to independently • prepare and write project applications by identifying the project's contribution to existing knowledge and experience, the most effective approach to and structure of it, cost effectiveness, and the relevant audiences/ project beneficiaries.</p>	<p>EQF descriptor Skills Level 7 – <i>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</i></p>	<p>Identification and problematisation of what Europe and the EU represents for its citizens and for the wider world</p>	<p>• Ability to identify a suitable work placement or research project as a preparation for the occupational field meeting the profile of the programme; outline a related work plan and participate in placement or project successfully</p>	<p>EQF descriptor Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences) Level 7 – <i>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches</i> – <i>Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</i></p>	<p>Analysis and interpretation of current issues regarding the handling of multicultural society issues into feasible solutions and transferring this knowledge to relevant audiences</p>	<p>Capability for self-analysis, that is the ability to accept and give critical constructive feedback, on the basis of a well-developed awareness of one's own identity and related norms and values; Ability to identify a suitable work placement or research project as a preparation for the occupational field meeting the profile of the programme; outline a related work plan and participate in placement or project successfully</p>
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QF EHEA 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors	SQF domain dimensions Level 7 (MASTER)	EQF descriptor Knowledge Level 7 – <i>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research</i> – <i>Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</i>	EQF descriptor Skills Level 7 – <i>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</i>	EQF descriptor Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences) Level 7 – <i>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches</i> – <i>Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</i>
Special feature degree programme	Human Being	<i>Deep understanding of European identity/is, civil society/ies, the ongoing European unification process in itself, its cultural and social dynamics and the consequences for its citizens and the wider world</i>	<i>Identification and problematisation of what Europe and the EU represents for its citizens and for the wider world</i>	<i>Analysis and interpretation of current issues regarding the handling of multicultural society issues into feasible solutions and transferring this knowledge to relevant audiences</i>
IV. <i>Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously</i>	6. Communication	1. Ability to perform and present the outcomes (in oral and written form) of independent research by making efficient use of primary and secondary sources (e.g. libraries, computerised material, bibliographical material).	Ability to communicate and transfer politicised and sensitive information in oral and written form to different types of addressees/ audiences in one's native, and (at least) one second language besides English at near native level.	Productive participation in group work and taking the lead on occasion, presiding over debates and discussions in an international/ multicultural group.

<p>QF EHEA 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle descriptors</p>	<p>SQF domain dimensions Level 7 (MASTER)</p>	<p>EQF descriptor Knowledge Level 7 – <i>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research</i> – <i>Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</i></p>	<p>EQF descriptor Skills Level 7 – <i>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</i></p>	<p>EQF descriptor Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences) Level 7 – <i>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches</i> – <i>Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</i></p>
<p>Special feature degree programme</p>	<p>Human Being</p>	<p><i>Deep understanding of European identity/is, civil society/ies, the ongoing European unification process in itself, its cultural and social dynamics and the consequences for its citizens and the wider world</i></p>	<p><i>Identification and problematisation of what Europe and the EU represents for its citizens and for the wider world</i></p>	<p><i>Analysis and interpretation of current issues regarding the handling of multicultural society issues into feasible solutions and transferring this knowledge to relevant audiences</i></p>
<p><i>V. Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous</i></p>	<p>7. Professional Development</p>	<p>Insight into their personal strengths and weaknesses and their abilities, and are able to select the learning methods necessary for the chosen profession or range of professions.</p>	<p>Ability to apply different methods and strategies of study to different tasks and to undertake independent study.</p>	<p>Capability to learn from and respond accurately to unexpected developments, taking these into account to accommodate and develop suitable strategies accordingly.</p>

## In conclusion

During the last decade tremendous progress has been made in developing instruments, models and tools to accommodate the explosion of student mobility that has flooded Europe and the world. As has been stipulated this progress is mainly due to the commitment of personal initiatives. The ideas of these experts and officials were institutionalized and supported by formal organizations at both national and international level.

When at the Bologna conference in Berlin the 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 initiated a fundamental shift from input or staff-centred learning to output or student-centred learning. With this announcement not only governments but also most higher education institutions obtained an assignment with far reaching consequences. Already from 2000-2001 on this process input was prepared by the Joint Quality Initiative and the Tuning Projects and confirmed at the Amsterdam Bologna Seminar on Quality which resulted in the Amsterdam consensus. At that conference, the work of governments, of quality assurance officials and academics represented in Tuning came together.

The Copenhagen Bologna seminar, which took place one year later, confirmed that frameworks and reference points would be an absolute necessity for developing a European Higher Education Area. The years 1989-2000 had showed us that ECTS in its existing stage of being mainly a transfer system would be insufficient. In practice the unreliable mechanism of course-to-course comparison instead of comparing periods of study measured in ECTS credits was still widely used.

From this chapter it can be digested that qualifications frameworks, sectoral profiles/ reference frameworks as well as degree programme profiles or reference points are indispensable instruments for national and international higher education in the world of today. Output-based learning can simply not work without clear reference points. It is a cause for praise that in the Bergen Communiqué (2005) the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area based on work of the Joint Quality Initiative which has resulted in the Dublin Descriptors, was endorsed. The European Commission deserves the same praise for the development of the EQF for Lifelong Learning, which was agreed three years later by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. However, at the same time, it needs underlining that both overarching frameworks were developed by 'officials', not academics. It is therefore no surprise that both frameworks did not land or landed very slowly in the academic world. If accepted this was mainly due to the fact that it was built according to the quality assurance and accreditation criteria.

During the same years Tuning and Thematic networks developed their reference points for individual subject areas. This was a successful process – the documents produced were well received –, but its application was very variable which was mainly due to the fact that it was left to the individual projects to distribute their results. This has proven to be a strategic mistake. Although since the Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué the ministers and their officials asked explicitly for the support of the higher education institutions, they have so far shown no serious interest in what has been developed as international mechanisms by the higher education sector to implement the outcomes based approach. This has clearly backfired on the Bologna Process as such. It has simply not been understood that degree programme reforms do not only require references at a meta-level, but most at all at the level of the individual subject area and the sector in which they have been positioned.

However, it is not too late. It has not been helpful that higher education institutions have had to deal with two competing European Qualifications frameworks – in the past 10 years or so – frameworks which are not fully compatible. The development of Tuning sectoral reference frameworks based on dimensions can be perceived as a breakthrough. They not only bridge the two European overarching frameworks but also the meta-profiles/ reference points at subject area level. The sectoral reference frameworks or profiles developed so far offer the necessary precision required for degree programme design, delivery, quality assurance and enhancement and the recognition of degrees and periods of studies. Compatible reference frameworks should be rapidly developed for all other sectors. This seems the Columbus' Egg that academic institutions and their staff have been looking for: a simple, transparent instrument which is owned and used by all involved in the modernisation of higher education in Europe and the world.

Finally, with a clear model and structure to identify levels within a cycle – a key element for building and showing progression in the level of achievement – one of the last remaining issues, has been solved in a convincing way.

## 10. Developing a New Strategy for Defining and Measuring What is Needed: Agreeing Common Ground <sup>685</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*Around 2015 it became clear that little progress had been made during the previous five years with respect to the modernisation of higher education programmes in the European Higher Education Area. This was the case at system level as well as with regard to the paradigm change towards student-centred and active learning. In the meantime a debate had developed on how to measure learning outcomes in particular skills and (wider) competences. This discourse inspired the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to set up a feasibility study, Assessments of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO), which applied a top-down model. It obtained little support in the academic community in particular in Europe and the USA. Although this study proved not to be a success, the experience motivated Tuning to take a new bold initiative. This initiative built on the work it had established so far, in the conviction that internationally agreed qualifications descriptors lend themselves for measuring and comparing. The new action was developed in close consultation with the European Commission and Educational Testing Service (ETS). Tuning had five reasons for submitting the project Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education (CALOHEE). In the first place, it had concluded that there was a clear need for updating, improving and deepening the available Tuning instruments. This implied better alignment with the existing frameworks in key academic fields. Secondly, although, Tuning intended from the outset that its frameworks would prepare graduates better for their societal role, in practice the included descriptors were not very concrete in terms of preparing for citizenship and employment. A third reason was that the developed descriptors should be more precise to allow for measuring, which required an additional instrument. A fourth, related argument, was that the existing frameworks, which were used as the core instruments for quality assurance,*

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<sup>685</sup> This chapter is partly based on the *CALOHEE working paper for Civic, Social and Cultural Engagement*. Groningen, 9 May 2017 and on two papers published in 2018: Robert Wagenaar, What do we know – What should we know? Measuring and comparing achievements of learning in European Higher Education: initiating the new CALOHEE approach, in: Olga Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Miriam Toepper, Hans Anand Pant, Corinna Lautenbach and Christine Kuhn, eds. *Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education. Cross-National Comparisons and Perspectives*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018, pp. 169-189 and Robert Wagenaar, Skills and Learning Gain(s) in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Higher education: Politics or Policy?, in: Brendan Cantwell, Hamish Coates, and Roger King, eds., *Handbook on the Politics of Higher Education*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2018, pp. 504-522.

*were constructed to look backward (evaluating past performance) not forward in terms of what to expect from a graduate. In other words, they were not sufficiently focussing on relevance besides quality for the sake of quality. CALOHEE ran from 2016 to 2018 and developed three types of outcomes: state-of-the-art reference points (benchmarks) for five academic sectors/subjects areas, detailed assessment reference frameworks for these disciplines including examples of good practice for learning, teaching and assessment. The third outcome was a multi-dimensional assessment instrument that would allow for transnational measuring and comparing learning in a fair way doing justice to the mission and profile of individual higher education institutions and degree programmes. These newly defined instruments should act – which was the fifth reason – as a further catalyst for the reforming of degree programmes, because they would facilitate referencing and comparing. CALOHEE can be perceived as another good example of applying the multi-level/ multi-actor governance model.*

## Introduction

In the previous chapters the different governing and implementation layers of the Bologna Process to arrive to a European Higher Education Area have been discussed. In the process of preparing the ministerial conference in Yerevan in 2015 frustrations were expressed about the slow level of progress. In particular countries which had made a real effort noticed that there was an obvious lack of commitment to the process in other countries, which in practice had led to very uneven results in Europe. This opinion was shared by the E4 consultancy members, the European University Association, EURASHE, ESU and ENQA, as well as the Council of Europe and, most of all, the European Commission.<sup>686</sup> The only noticeable outcome of the three years since the Bucharest Communiqué was a revised ECTS Users' Guide, published in the early months of 2015.<sup>687</sup> Although undertaking this revision was claimed as a task of the Bologna Process signatory countries, it was the European Commission as the owner of the tool, that did the job.<sup>688</sup> Tuning experts again played a central role in this revision.

As has been highlighted previously, also the Tuning expert group expressed concern about the disappointing penetration of the student-centred and related outcomes-based approach in the higher education institutions in the years preceding the Yerevan ministers conference. The Tuning expert group looked for new and better strategies, which resulted in setting-up the Tuning Sectoral Qualifica-

<sup>686</sup> The Bologna Process Revisited: The future of the European Higher Education Area. Doc. Code: BFUG\_LV\_IS\_43\_4. Last modified 10.12.2014.

<sup>687</sup> European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide 2015*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

<sup>688</sup> See chapter 4.

tions Reference Frameworks for the Social Sciences and the Humanities and the Creative and Performing Arts which were discussed in the previous chapter. In these frameworks the Tuning subject area-based descriptors were aligned with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

In that same period Tuning became involved in an initiative of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which was the feasibility study *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes* (AHELO). The AHELO initiative fitted in the world-wide interest for developing approaches to measure learning outcomes, in particular the generic ones. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, and living in a competitive world, a growing need was felt to benchmark higher education performance at system level as well as at degree programme level.<sup>689</sup> On the suggestion of the European Commission and a number of national governments, Tuning was invited by the OECD to prepare conceptual frameworks for the subject areas of civil engineering and economics. They should serve as a basis for developing a standardized test for those areas in a global perspective to measure performance at the end of the first cycle/ bachelor. For this purpose, Tuning set up two working groups of international experts from all over the world. It prepared the frameworks in a rather short period, from March to July 2009.<sup>690</sup> A first presentation about the Tuning approach had been offered to the OECD and participating countries in December 2008.<sup>691</sup> The two Tuning-AHELO frameworks served as a basis – in combination with other information – to launch a tender for building the testing instrument. This was done by a consortium led by an Australian consultancy firm.

Tuning's role in AHELO showed once again its deep involvement in the discussion about the application of learning outcomes at different policy levels. Wagenaar was invited to be a member of the Technical Advisory Board of AHELO, which in practice served as a supervisory board of the feasibility study. Although the study resulted in three substantial volumes, it was not perceived as

<sup>689</sup> I. Katsarova, *Higher education in the EU. Approaches, issues and trends. In-depth analysis*. European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2015, 1 and 23-28.

<sup>690</sup> OECD. (January 2012), *Engineering Assessment Framework. AHELO Feasibility Study*. Retrieved 26-11-2016: [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne\(2011\)19/ANN5/FINAL&doclanguage=en](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne(2011)19/ANN5/FINAL&doclanguage=en);

OECD. (April 2012). *Economics Assessment Framework. AHELO Feasibility Study* (April 2012). Retrieved 21-11-2016 from: [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne\(2011\)19/ANN3/FINAL&doclanguage=en](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne(2011)19/ANN3/FINAL&doclanguage=en)

<sup>691</sup> R. Wagenaar, Presentation "DEVELOPING (CYCLE) LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND SETS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR SUBJECT AREAS: THE TUNING APPROACH". 1st meeting of the AHELO Group of National Experts. Paris 17-18 December 2008; See also: Wagenaar, R., *Learning Outcomes a Fair Way to Measure Performance in Higher Education: the Tuning Approach*. Outcomes of higher education: Quality relevance and impact. Paris: OECD, 8-10 September 2008: <http://www.oecd.org/site/eduimheo8/41203784.pdf>

a success because it did not produce a suitable and workable approach.<sup>692</sup> It did however show the challenges and limitations of global comparison of learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the OECD initiative is interesting not only for the lessons learned, but also from the perspective of the governing principle in the higher education sector as a global player financed by national governments. AHELO involved countries from all continents, which signed up to the initiative on a voluntary basis. AHELO distinguished four strands, two focussing on disciplinary related knowledge and skills for the two selected subject areas, and a third focussing on transferable or general skills, such as critical thinking. The fourth was a contextual strand, which should make visible the differences in culture between countries.<sup>693</sup>

Tuning took note of the AHELO results in 2013, and drew the conclusion that a real multi-level/ multi-actor governance approach was required to come up with useful outcomes. This would require a model in which the European level and the academics at grass-root level were aligned again. However, it waited for some time to take any action, because the OECD announced at several moments in 2014 and 2015 that it would launch a follow-up through a 'main study', which should cover the period 2015-2020. The aim of this main study was to deliver data that would (1) 'allow governments to evaluate the quality of their tertiary educated human capital among the higher educated cohorts against the international standards'; (2) 'enable institutions to compare and benchmark the learning outcomes of their students against international standards in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning' and (3) 'empower students to weigh their learned skills against the distribution of learning outcomes in their own institution and country and against international standards'.<sup>694</sup> The proposal was discussed at a meeting of countries interested to pursue AHELO in London on 11 February 2015. This meeting was hosted by the United Kingdom, which had not been involved in the feasibility study. The OECD did not receive sufficient support at this meeting to make a start with the intended follow-up.

In October 2015 at their international autumn conference 'Higher Education Futures' held in Singapore the OECD announced again that it intended to soon start the AHELO main study. The announcement surprised those present, and once more, this expressed ambition did not become a reality. In the meantime,

<sup>692</sup> Karine Tremblay, Diane Lalancette, Deborah Roseveare, *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes AHELO*. Volumes 1-3. Paris: OECD, 2012-2013. Volume 1. Design and Implementation, chapter 4 Instrument Development. See for the countries involved in the feasibility study Annex A.

<sup>693</sup> Karine Tremblay, Diane Lalancette, Deborah Roseveare, *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes AHELO*. Volume 1, Chapter 4 Instrument Development, Paris: OECD, 2012, 105-146. See for the countries involved in the feasibility study Annex A of the same Volume.

<sup>694</sup> OECD Website: AHELO Main Study. Retrieved 30-07-2018 from: <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/ahelo-main-study.htm>



in March 2015, Tuning had submitted a proposal in the context of the EU ERASMUS+ Action Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects after consulting the European Commission and in cooperation with the USA based Educational Testing Service, for setting up its own study. It named the initiative *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education (CALOHEE)*. The main differences with AHELO were that Tuning chose for a bottom-up approach, in order to give the academic community a central position in the further implementation of the process of modernisation of higher education in Europe, and it limited itself to Europe.<sup>695</sup> The global AHELO had applied a top-down approach steered by ministerial representatives.

CALOHEE included five subject areas in its project, representing five academic sectors, 70 academics and 6 student representatives, together covering a wide range of EU countries plus Turkey. Contrary to AHELO, it also assured involvement and commitment of many European university networks and relevant organisations.<sup>696</sup> There was good reason for focussing on one region only, because – although Tuning was operating globally –, all Tuning projects so far had been regionally based. It was thought better to limit the effort to Europe, where trust and confidence had been built over nearly 30 years of ERASMUS. AHELO had shown that cultural and educational diversity complicated the reliability of the instruments to be developed, as well as the outcomes. In AHELO diversity and disparity between countries and their educational systems had been clearly underestimated despite a ‘contextual strand’, that had been included in its project outline. This strand was expected to offer a sufficient basis and safeguard for avoiding misinterpretation of results. However, in practice, AHELO struggled with insufficient cohesion throughout its lifespan.

CALOHEE was selected for funding in the summer of 2015. The response to the CALOHEE initiative by Andreas Schleicher, OECD director for education and skills, showed irritation. He stated that the “European approach is basically giving up on the idea of measuring outcomes in a serious and comparative way” and that the CALOHEE system would involve “each institution setting its own framework”, an approach that was “not something the OECD would get into”. An EU official contradicted him by stating that the aim of CALOHEE was “developing a methodology for an internationally comparable assessment of what students

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<sup>695</sup> CALOHEE Website: <https://www.calohee.eu>

<sup>696</sup> Full partners: European Student Union (ESU), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA), European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE), University networks: Coimbra, Santander, UNICA, Utrecht, Compostela. Members of its advisory board: *European University Association (EUA)*, *the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)*, *European Association for International Education (EAIE)*, *U-Multirank*, *Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)*, *ENIC-NARICs* and *BIBB (HE-VET)*

learn, including their skills. The project will also provide the data needed that will enable individual universities to compare and improve their performance”.<sup>697</sup>

Tuning had several reasons for setting-up CALOHEE. In the very first place, its subject area based reference frameworks were now nearly ten years old. They had proven to be very useful as a tool to design, implement, deliver and enhance degree programmes, but over time they showed three serious weaknesses. The first was the lack of alignment between the different frameworks, which are hierarchical: overarching, national, sectoral and subject area-based. Although these frameworks were developed in more or less the same period there was no serious coordination. As a result, a set of qualifications frameworks was produced which proved difficult to apply in combination, as they were based on different philosophies and parameters. Tuning regarded as the second and third weaknesses of its subject area reference frameworks the lack of attention to reaching out to the world of work, and not including civic awareness. The frameworks, also intended as a reference for enhancing the quality of degree programmes, were not very well designed to look forward, that is to involve skills and competences required for the future.

However, a decisive argument to start CALOHEE was to develop a strategy to renew the interest of the higher education sector in the reforms of its degree programmes in the context of the Bologna Process. In other words, to obtain momentum again from all governing levels and actors involved in the development of a European Higher Education Area. The question raised and answered in this chapter is which approach Tuning chose and instruments it developed to offer a new stimulant for reform. An approach and instruments that should allow for international comparison and measuring of learning.

## Role of qualifications frameworks

The first action in rolling out the CALOHEE project plan was to establish full alignment of qualifications frameworks at different levels. This was conditional for making next steps, that is to deepen the set of descriptors into so-called ‘assessment reference frameworks’ and to develop an approach to measure and compare learning in a(n) (inter)national perspective. The ultimate goal was to define the tools for comparative testing of students at the end of their first cycle/bachelor. Regarding the ‘framing’ of higher education in terms of qualifications reference frameworks, Tuning and CALOHEE made the distinction between the

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<sup>697</sup> Morgan, John, EU backs project to test students across Europe. Calohee learning outcomes project criticised by OECD, whose own scheme has failed to get going, in: *Times Higher Education*. 4 September 2015.

*meta-level*, that is the European/ national frameworks, the *macro-level*, covering the academic domain or sector (e.g. natural sciences), the *meso-level*, being the meta-profile ‘mapping’ of the subject area and the *micro-level*, that is the individual degree programme. All these ‘level frameworks’ had their own features. The lower the level, the more precision in its definitions was expected. The latter three level documents had resulted from consultations and intensive debate among groups of informed academics and validation by peers.<sup>698</sup>

Nowadays, qualifications frameworks are perceived as indispensable instruments and references for defining, identifying and meeting quality standards. This was well understood by the group of government officials and representatives of quality assurance organisations that developed the Dublin Descriptors, which were embedded in the QF for the EHEA in 2005, as outlined in the previous chapter.<sup>699</sup> These officials realised that the only feasible way for governments to influence the outcomes and levels of learning in the twenty-first century was the introduction and construction of qualifications frameworks. These frameworks were also regarded as instruments for quality assurance. This was also well understood by the European Commission when developing the EQF for Lifelong Learning. However, as has been noted, quality assurance and accreditation at programme level require that the learning outcomes of each individual programme are referenced, not only against overarching and national qualifications framework, but also against subject-area based qualifications reference frameworks. To be really useful, these different frameworks should be fully aligned and be up-to-date, which was not the case when the CALOHEE initiative was launched.

Building on the work done in HUMART and the paper prepared by Wagenaar on frameworks<sup>700</sup>, in CALOHEE, a template was further developed and applied which allowed for a full merger of the EQF for Lifelong Learning and the QF for the EHEA. By using this approach, it made use of ‘the best of two worlds’. While the EQF is focused on the application of knowledge and skills in society, the focus of the QF for the EHEA is more related to the learning process

<sup>698</sup> Ellen Hazelkorn, Alexander C. McCormick, Andrew Gibson and Hamish Coates, eds. *Research Handbook on Quality, Performance and Accountability in Higher Education*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2018, 282.

<sup>699</sup> Marlies Leegwater, Joint Quality Initiative – the origin of the Dublin Descriptors – short history. The Hague, June 2015. Retrieved on 8 July 2018 from: <http://ecahe.eu/assets/uploads/2016/01/Joint-Quality-Initiative-the-origin-of-the-Dublin-descriptors-short-history.pdf>

<sup>700</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, *Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010 – 2011 [SQF HUMART Final Report 2010-2011]*. Bilbao: University of Deusto, 2012. Retrieved from: [http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF\\_HUMART\\_Final\\_Report\\_2010-2011.pdf](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/HUMART/SQF_HUMART_Final_Report_2010-2011.pdf);

Robert Wagenaar, Columbus’ Egg? Qualifications Frameworks, Sectoral Profiles and Degree Programme Profiles in Higher Education, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Issue No.1, October 2013, pp. 71-103.

itself: it applies descriptors that cover different areas or ‘dimensions’ of learning. These are knowledge and understanding, application of knowledge and understanding in relation to problem solving, making judgments, communicating information, conclusions etc., and learning capability. In developing the CALOHEE approach, the conclusion was confirmed that ‘dimensions’ are indispensable to define the field of study by distinguishing constitutive constructive key elements. The ‘dimension approach’ was seen as complementary to the three categories, included in the EQF for Lifelong Learning which were dubbed ‘learning domains’ in 2017.<sup>701</sup> Initially, a number of the academics involved in CALOHEE expressed their doubts about the usefulness of the proposed merging of the two frameworks, but at its second General meeting taking place mid-November 2016 it was unanimously concluded this was the best way forward.

Although an obvious connection was expected with the five or six areas of learning (depending on the cycle covered) or ‘dimensions’ formulated as general descriptors in the QF for the EHEA, the HUMART experienced showed that each sector should also define its own set of sectoral/ subject area dimensions in order to be able to do justice to its field. From the different sets of dimensions defined by the five CALOHEE subject area groups of academics it can be digested that academic sectors and disciplines should be judged in their own right. Table 1 offers, as an illustration, an overview of the dimensions identified to structure the learning of a particular academic field. In CALOHEE these were civil engineering, history, nursing, physics and teacher education, representing in CALOHEE the academic sectors engineering, humanities, health care, natural sciences and social sciences.

As can be observed, there are overlaps in dimensions, but also obvious distinctions which are related to the identity of the subject area.

As a first outcome, the CALOHEE project developed easy-to-read one-page tables or grids of (competence) descriptors for both the bachelor and the master, the first and the second cycle. These should be perceived as the current qualifications reference frameworks or meta-profiles of the sectors and subject areas involved, and can be seen as a crucial addition to the existing Tuning subject area reference points brochures published during the years 2008-2010 in Europe, and later in other parts of the world. The tables offer insight to all main stakeholders into what constitutes a particular subject area. The tables also became the core of the 2018 editions of the *Tuning Guidelines and Reference Points 2018 for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes* for the five subject areas involved.<sup>702</sup>

<sup>701</sup> European Commission, *The European Qualifications Framework: supporting learning, work and cross-border mobility*. 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018.

<sup>702</sup> Alfredo Squarzoni and Alfredo Soeiro, eds., *TUNING Guidelines and Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Civil Engineering. Edition 2018*. Groningen, 2018; Julia M. González Ferreras and Maria Yarosh, eds., *TUNING Guidelines and Reference Points*

Table 1: Subject area dimensions

Subject area/ dimension	Civil engineering	Teacher education	History	Nursing	Physics
1.	Knowledge and understanding	Knowledge management and creation	Human beings: cultures and societies	Professional values and the role of the nurse	Knowledge and understanding
2.	Analysis and problem-solving	Design and management of processes of learning, teaching and assessment	Texts and contexts	Nurse practice and clinical decision-making	Mathematical methods
3.	Design	Learner empowerment, potential and creativity	Theories and concepts	Knowledge and cognitive competences	Experimental design and scientific investigation
4.	Investigations	Communication	Interdisciplinarity	Communication and interpersonal competences	Problem-solving
5.	Practice	Values and social leadership	Communication	Leadership, management and team working	Scientific (physics) culture
6.	Decisions	Development as professionals and life-long learners	Initiative and creativity		Ethical awareness
7.	Team working		Professional development		Communication
8.	Communication				Management and teamwork
9.	Lifelong learning				

for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Teacher Education. Edition 2018. Groningen, 2018; Ann Katherine Isaacs, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson and Carla Salvaterra, eds., *TUNING Guidelines and Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in History. Edition 2018*. Groningen, 2018; Mary Gobbi and Marja Kaunonen, eds., *TUNING Guidelines and Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Nursing. Edition 2018*. Groningen, 2018; Ornella Pantano and Fernando Cornet, eds.,

*TUNING Guidelines and Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Physics. Edition 2018*. Groningen, 2018.

These five subject area reference frameworks have been published on the CALOHEE Website and the International Tuning Academy website.

Another new element to these brochures is the identification of roles and tasks of graduates, which go beyond an inventory of occupations. To collect more detailed information a questionnaire was distributed among the academics involved in CALOHEE, the outcomes of which were an eye opener. They showed that it is indeed possible to identify clear accumulated sets of tasks and roles of graduates per subject area, which offer much more useful information to take into account when designing and updating the content of degree programmes than an overview of typical occupations can offer. From the available material, it became obvious that many of these typical roles and tasks are not (yet) 'trained' (very well or explicitly) in higher education programmes.<sup>703</sup> This was welcome information when defining the descriptors for the learning domain 'responsibility and autonomy' (wider-competences), which is the third column in the tables.

## Competency reference frameworks for the world of work

When the CALOHEE project was developed, the initiators asked themselves the pertinent question: do students enrolled in higher education around Europe develop the competences they need? The same question had been asked when launching Tuning in 2000, but the answers found then were no longer satisfactory. In the view of the Tuning experts team, the subject area qualifications reference frameworks should be a reflection of current and future needs, and the latter they did not do sufficiently well. They should do justice on the one hand to the requirements of the subject area involved, both in terms of knowledge and related skills, but on the other also to the competences to apply them in practice. This required the inclusion of appropriate generic competences, which should be well aligned with the knowledge and skills component. This again was a distinct feature in comparison to the AHELO approach. AHELO made a clear distinction between a 'generic skills and competences strand' and 'subject specific knowledge and skills strands' for respectively civil engineering and economics. In the perception of Tuning, these two strands should not be separated and should be fully integrated in the teaching and learning process. This point of view was based on the fact that generic competences are not only developed in the setting of a domain of knowledge, but are also perceived differently between educational sectors.

As stipulated, the EQF for Lifelong Learning, focussing on the societal role of the learner, applies the categories of knowledge, skills and responsibility and

<sup>703</sup> CALOHEE. Summary of CALOHEE questionnaires outcomes on typical degrees and occupations (2016). Retrieved 29-11-2016: <https://www.calohee.eu/summery-calohee-questionnaires-typical-degrees-occupations/>

autonomy (competences) to structure its descriptors. In CALOHEE terms the three columns or learning domains correspond to a 'knowledge framework', a 'skills framework' and a 'competency framework' linked by level. The third column, the 'competency framework', refers directly to the wider world of work and society and identifies the competences required to operate successfully in the workplace and as a citizen.<sup>704</sup> The highest level of learning is represented by this third column in the framework, which is based on the knowledge and the skills that have been obtained, and ideally practiced, as part of the learning process. It can be compared to competency frameworks as applied by employers or fields of employment.<sup>705</sup> Such a framework describes in some detail which competences an employee in a particular occupation is expected to possess and be able to apply in practice. They are often reflected in job descriptions and job advertisements. Employment can range from research and analysis-oriented positions to more practical ones: the competences required will vary, but will be related to the general competences linked to the subject area.

Over time many competency frameworks have been developed for a specific job sector, company or institution. A good example of a well-developed competency framework is the one the OECD produced in 2014 for the selection/assessment and promotion of its own staff.<sup>706</sup> This competency framework is linked to the catchwords: learn, perform, succeed. It makes a distinction between 'technical competences' (subject specific competences) and 'core competences' (generic competences). It identifies 15 'core competences' which are organised in three clusters: 'delivery-related competences' focusing on achieving results; 'interpersonal competences' focusing on building relationships; and 'strategic competences' focusing on planning for the future. The 'delivery-related competences' are: analytical thinking, focus on achievement, drafting skills, flexible thinking, resource management, teamwork, and team leadership. The Interpersonal competences selected are: client focus, diplomatic sensitivity, negotiating, organizational knowledge. The strategic competences identified are developing talent, organizational alignment, strategic networking and strategic thinking. For each of these competences a definition has been formulated.

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<sup>704</sup> CALOHEE, Subject Area based Assessment Frameworks. *Discussion Paper on the design of Assessment Frameworks based on Sectoral and Subject Area Qualifications Frameworks*. CALOHEE website: <https://www.calohee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Working-Paper-on-Subject-Area-based-Assessment-Frameworks.pdf>

<sup>705</sup> OECD, *Competency Framework*. 2014. Retrieved 17-10-2016: [https://www.oecd.org/careers/competency\\_framework\\_en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/careers/competency_framework_en.pdf); Microsoft website (n.d.); Greater London Authority website (n.d.); P. Sastre-Fullana, J.E. De Pedro-Gómez, M. Bennasar-Veny, J.M. Morales-Asencio, Competency frameworks for advanced practice nursing: a literature review, in: *International Nursing Review*. Volume 61, Issue 4. December 2014, pp. 534–542.

<sup>706</sup> OECD, *Competency Framework*. 2014. Retrieved 17-10-2016 from: [https://www.oecd.org/careers/competency\\_framework\\_en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/careers/competency_framework_en.pdf)

Based on these competences the OECD competency framework offers indicators for different levels, which are associated with types of jobs. Level 1 is typically associated with jobs as assistants, secretaries and operators and the like; level 2 with jobs as statisticians, corporate management and administration assistants/officers, logistics officers and documentalists; level 3 with jobs as economists/policy analysts, IT analysts and human resources advisers; level 4 with jobs as senior economists/policy analysts or managers. Level 5, the highest level identified, is associated with jobs as heads of division, counsellors, deputy directors and directors and so forth. The typical jobs identified for the OECD might have limited value for many of the subject area covered by CALOHEE, but the operationalization of levels is useful. This is because the indicators used are clearly related to levels of responsibility and autonomy, the main indicators covered in the ‘competence strand’ (autonomy and responsibility) of the EQF. The OECD Framework is also relevant because it clearly links the ‘tasks and roles’ executed as part of the jobs identified. The OECD document distinguishes three job families: ‘executive leadership’, ‘policy research, analysis and advice’, and ‘corporate management and administration’. The OECD framework is only one example; many others can be found on the Internet.<sup>707</sup> Besides in the Management sector, competency frameworks have been drawn up and are applied in the Health Care sector.<sup>708</sup> Besides these job related frameworks recently a competency framework has been published for student work-based learning covering all levels of higher education, including the PhD.<sup>709</sup>

In CALOHEE this type of competency framework proved to be very inspirational for the five working groups to define the descriptors for the third column of their subject area. It offered the type of language that is normally not applied in higher education but expressed best the actual operationalisation of knowledge, skills and wider competences in practical situations, that is the real world.

## Competency reference frameworks for civic, social and cultural engagement

From the very start of the Tuning initiative the aim was to develop programmes in which a balance was found between becoming knowledgeable about

<sup>707</sup> Microsoft website, GreaterLondonAuthority website

<sup>708</sup> P. Sastre-Fullana, J.E. De Pedro-Gómez, M. Bennasar-Veny, J.M. Morales-Asencio, Competency frameworks for advanced practice nursing: a literature review, in: *International Nursing Review*. Volume 61, Issue 4. December 2014, pp. 534–542.

<sup>709</sup> H.M Jones and L. Warnock, *Towards a competency framework for student work-based learning*. The Higher Education Academy, York, September 2014. Retrieved 28-11-2016 from: <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/biology/Towards%20a%20competency%20framework%20for%20student%20work-based%20learning.pdf>



a particular field of study, feeding personal interest, preparing for the world of work and active citizenship. Frankly, however, over time Tuning had given limited attention to the latter item. The ‘ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness’ was only included in the 2008 list of generic competences. The competence ‘Appreciation of (and respect for) diversity and multiculturalism’ (surveys 2001 and 2008) did not score very high in the Tuning survey among main stakeholders. It was not much different for ‘Ethical reasoning’ (2001 survey)/ ‘Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning’ (2008 survey). An explanation for the limited urgency that was felt regarding civic awareness – although also in the 1990s Europe had to deal with high unemployment and a refugee crisis -, might be that the governing structures and institutions at both European and national level were not seriously challenged.<sup>710</sup>

The situation changed dramatically since 2008. In that year the banking and mortgage crisis in the USA and the related setback of globalization and neo-liberal policies developed quickly into a rather disturbing cocktail.<sup>711</sup> Resulting in high unemployment in many countries – in particular among the average and lower income groups, as well as youth in general – had a considerable negative effect on trust and confidence in the political and economic elite. In the perception of large segments of society – rightly or wrongly – the income gap between the very rich – lacking obvious self-constraint – and the relatively poor widened. Health care systems – because of the aging populations – and the traditional European welfare system came under pressure. Tenured employment contracts gave partly way to flex-contracts. The number of self-employed grew. Hedge funds, large investment organisations and international companies seemed sometimes more powerful than governments- in the opinion of the typical citizen – in making and steering policies. As an illustration: a company as Apple had in January 2018 a cash flow of 285 billion dollars.<sup>712</sup> Global companies also built a reputation as tax-avoiders. Companies closed down and moved to low(er) salary countries to increase profits and please shareholders and to stay competitive. Solidarity has been challenged as a result.

Growing unease with these developments combined with bloody conflicts in parts of North- and West-Africa, the Middle East and South-Asia resulted in a refugee crisis which has given (further) rise to populism. At the same time, integration of earlier groups of (political and economic) migrants in Europe only partly succeeded and for many failed, making the multi-cultural society a high-

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<sup>710</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>711</sup> See for example: Jan Zielonka, *Counter-revolution. Liberal Europe in Retreat*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

<sup>712</sup> CNBC markets Website: Apple’s cash pile hits \$285.1 billion, a record. Retrieved 05-10-2018 from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/01/apple-earnings-q1-2018-how-much-money-does-apple-have.html>

ly debated issue. Resulting terrorism, inspired by developments elsewhere, led to growing concern, even outspoken fear among large segments of society. Tolerance regarding other cultures, religions and even well-defined opinions was put under (severe) pressure.

The self-confidence of many societal groups was gradually undermined. There is an obvious tendency to look for safety and security by retreating to the own local community and taking distance from 'the other'. This process resulted in voting for local political parties, and local representatives, which can be interpreted as symbolic protests against the traditional nationally organized parties. It is reflected in nationalistic rhetoric, which seems also to be embraced by the old parties. It also resulted in the wish for closing borders to protect economic self-interest, e.g. employability and the traditional values of society. The reproach that the established political parties lack (a) understanding of the needs of society and lack (b) a well-defined and convincing political programme which allows for tackling the apparent problems and (c) that their politicians seem often to be more interested in their personal welfare than that of society as a whole, implicitly undercut the democratic process. It resulted in asking/ opting for strong personal leadership by large groups in society. This – as a result – seemed to affect freedom of speech and expression; in a number of countries journalism is presently under growing pressure which leads to repression and to (self-) censorship. The fact that autocratic leaders base some of their policies on the creation of hostile images of the other and make constructions of the past and present which fit them best, is reason for serious concern; in particular, when it involves the blackening of groups of citizens with a different cultural and/or religious background. It even leads to territorial claims, which endangers world peace.<sup>713</sup>

Populist politicians focus on the anger and fear of citizens by making promises which cannot be held in reality. They are communicating directly with their followers, through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Followers are not organised in regular political parties, but in so-called movements.<sup>714</sup> In many cases, social media – which make automatic selections of news according to the expectations of the users – and the yellow press are often their only sources of information. Through social media so-called misinformation and fake news has been introduced and widely distributed, having also a clear commercial dimension. This type of news, but also misleading information resulting from 'quoting politicians' by traditional news media has undermined the reliability of news reports. In a very short time, 'fact checking' has become a profession in itself.

<sup>713</sup> See for example: James Kirchick, *The End of Europe. Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age*. New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2017.

<sup>714</sup> See for example: Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* London: Penguin Books, 2017.

Part of the same discourse is the denial of the value of experts' opinion in policy making and decision making processes in general, with clear examples in the underpinning of economic policies and the dangers of climate change. The introduction in the public dialogue of so-called 'alternative facts' is symbolic in this respect. In practice, it means that the significance of science for running and organizing our societies is subverted and in general its credibility is undermined. It has also implications regarding the importance of upholding ethical principles and values as well as professional standards, for keeping these societies sustainable.<sup>715</sup>

Another remarkable phenomenon is the grown interest for 'the self', which finds its expression in making selfies, but also in blogs and vlogs. These forms of self-expression can be perceived as positive, but also as exhibitionism.<sup>716</sup> In more negative terms this has been an inspiration/ has culminated in 'me first' behaviour with consequences for behaviour and ethical commitment. Self-enrichment and optimising individual profit fit in this picture. For obvious reasons this is related to neo-liberalism, but also as an outcome to the widening the gap of the haves (those who are doing well) and haves not (the victims of neo-liberalism and globalisation). Civic, social and cultural engagement have suffered as a consequence, which has put the welfare state and the sustainable (multi-cultural) society under severe pressure.

When developing the CALOHEE concept in 2015, it was concluded that these developments should also be a concern for higher education institutions and their degree programmes. The traditional empowerment to new generations of societal norms and values, and basic principles of cooperation and tolerance has for long been seen as a responsibility of both parents and primary and secondary education. Although it has been promoted that higher education has an obvious role in preparing students for active citizenship, in practice it has not been part of (most) existing curricula, at least it has not been made explicit in the outcomes of the formal learning programmes. Given the developments described above, which can and should be understood as current and future challenges, there seems to be an obvious responsibility for higher education. Because higher education prepares the next generation of societal leaders, it influences – at least partly – their future behaviour and therefore society.

The call for giving attention to active citizenship or in CALOHEE terms 'civic, social and cultural engagement' was not new. As said, already in 2000 it was defined as an integral part of the Tuning approach. Also the European Commission highlighted its relevance in its European Reference Framework

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<sup>715</sup> See for example: Hsiao-Hung Pai, *Angry White People. Coming Face-to-Face with the British Far Right*. London: Zed Books, 2016.

<sup>716</sup> See for example: Will Storr, *Selfie. How the West became self-obsessed*. London: Picador, 2018.

identifying 8 key competences for Lifelong Learning.<sup>717</sup> One of these competences is ‘social and civic competences’, another one is ‘cultural awareness and expression’. The Reference Framework was published in December 2006 as a formal EU recommendation and was particularly meant for secondary education. However, the competences included in the Framework are also very relevant for higher education. Competences are defined in this framework as ‘a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context’. They are those which ‘all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment’. According to the framework social and civic competences ‘include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation’. It is an important document in the context of CALOHEE and therefore deserves substantial coverage, in particular because it relates to many of the issues and concerns mentioned in the introduction to this section, but also because it addresses civic, social and cultural topics explicitly.<sup>718</sup>

In the EU Reference framework social competence is linked to personal and social well-being and successful interpersonal and social participation in society making the argument that ‘it is essential to understand the codes of conduct and manners generally accepted in different societies and environments (e.g. at work). It is equally important to be aware of basic concepts relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, gender equality and non-discrimination, society and culture’. It is also thought key to understand ‘the multi-cultural and socio-economic dimensions of European societies and how national cultural identity interacts with the European identity’. The core skills of this competence ‘include the ability to communicate constructively in different environments, to show tolerance, express and understand different viewpoints, to negotiate with the ability to create confidence, and to feel empathy’. It is also mentioned that ‘individuals should be capable of coping with stress and frustration and expressing them in a constructive way and should also distinguish between the personal and professional spheres’. It therefore requires ‘an attitude of collaboration, assertiveness and integrity. Individuals should have an interest in socio-economic developments and intercultural communication and should value diversity and

<sup>717</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)

<sup>718</sup> Ibidem, quotes on pages 13, 16.

respect others, and be prepared both to overcome prejudices and to compromise'.<sup>719</sup>

According to the Reference framework civic competence requires 'knowledge of the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, and civil rights, including how they are expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and international declarations and how they are applied by various institutions at the local, regional, national, European and international levels'. It also stipulates 'knowledge of contemporary events, as well as the main events and trends in national, European and world history', as well as the development of awareness of the aims, values and policies of social and political movements. Finally, it expects that EU citizens have 'knowledge of European integration and of the EU's structures, main objectives and values, as well as an awareness of diversity and cultural identities in Europe'.<sup>720</sup>

In the Reference framework text it is stated that 'skills for civic competence relate to the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain, and to display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. This involves critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in community or neighbourhood activities as well as decision-making at all levels, from local to national and European level, in particular through voting'. It asks for full respect and a positive attitude 'for human rights including equality as a basis for democracy, appreciation and understanding of differences between value systems of different religious or ethnic groups lay the foundations'. This implies 'displaying both a sense of belonging to one's locality, country, the EU and Europe in general and to the world, and a willingness to participate in democratic decision-making at all levels. It also includes demonstrating a sense of responsibility, as well as showing understanding of and respect for the shared values that are necessary to ensure community cohesion, such as respect for democratic principles. Constructive participation also involves civic activities, support for social diversity and cohesion and sustainable development, and a readiness to respect the values and privacy of others'.<sup>721</sup>

As part of the key competence 'Cultural awareness and expression' it is thought essential to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and other regions of the world, the need to preserve it. This requires 'a solid understanding of one's own culture and a sense of identity' as 'the basis for an open attitude towards and respect for diversity of cultural expression'.<sup>722</sup>

<sup>719</sup> Idem, quotes on page 17.

<sup>720</sup> Idem, quotes on page 17.

<sup>721</sup> Idem, quotes on page 17.

<sup>722</sup> Idem, quote on page 18. See also: European Commission, *Cultural Awareness and Expression Handbook*. Open Method of Coordination (OMC) working group of EU member states; experts on the development of the Key Competence 'Cultural Awareness and Expression'. European Agen-

The Key Competences Framework celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, motivated the European Commission to organize an extensive review of the Framework which was launched mid-2016 and reached the level of a public consultation which was implemented from February to May 2017<sup>723</sup>. In June 2017 a closing conference took place. It offered input for making informed changes in the initial framework presented.<sup>724</sup> The process itself was meant to enhance the feeling of ownership. It is made explicit in the defined Consultation Strategy paper that aimed to tackle a number of issues. Besides referring to the skills mismatch, it also mentions the Paris Declaration of March 2015<sup>725</sup> and the ET Joint Report of November 2015<sup>726</sup> in which the role of education is stressed in two of the four European priorities, to ‘ensure that pupils acquire solid social, civic and intercultural competences by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discriminating, as well as active citizenship’. Both documents also call ‘for enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particular in the use of Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to of discrimination and indoctrination’.<sup>727</sup> It was noted that the European Key Competences Framework needed updating ‘to reflect political, social, economic, ecological and technological developments since 2006, such as migration, globalisation, digital communication, the increased importance of STEM skills and social networks, and sustainable development issues’.<sup>728</sup> As was already mentioned in the previous chapter, in January 2018 the Commission published its final proposal to update the key competences for lifelong learning. The paper suggests eight key competences, of which the following three are of relevance here: ‘Personal, social and

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da for Culture. Work Plans for Culture 2015-2018/2011-2014. December 2015. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. Retrieved 05-10-2018: [http://kultur.creative-europe-desk.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/omk\\_Cultural\\_awareness\\_and\\_expression\\_handbook.pdf](http://kultur.creative-europe-desk.de/fileadmin/user_upload/omk_Cultural_awareness_and_expression_handbook.pdf)

<sup>723</sup> European Commission, DG EAC, *Review of the 2006 Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Consultation Strategy*. Brussels, 2017. See also European Commission, DG EAC, *Education and Training 2020 Work programme. Thematic Working Group “Assessment of Key Competences”. Literature review, glossary and examples*. Brussels, November 2012.

<sup>724</sup> European Commission, Support of the stakeholder consultation in the context of the Key Competences review. Conference Report. Authors: Janne Sylvest and Elisabeth Kwaw. Luxembourg: Publications of the European Union, 2017.

<sup>725</sup> Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. Informal meeting of European Union education ministers. Paris, Tuesday 17 March 2015. Retrieved 01-08-2018 from: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf)

<sup>726</sup> 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (2015/C 417/04)

<sup>727</sup> European Commission website: Education and radicalisation – the Paris Declaration one year on. Retrieved 01-10-2018 from:

[https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20160316-paris-declaration-education\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20160316-paris-declaration-education_en)

<sup>728</sup> European Commission, DG EAC, *Review of the 2006 Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Consultation Strategy*. Brussels, 2017, 8.

learning competence', 'Civic competence' and 'Cultural awareness and expression competence'. As in the case of the 2006 Key Competences the revised ones are explained in detail in the Commission paper.<sup>729</sup>

In terms of its topics, the EU approach covers a wider set than for example the Australian Civics & Citizenship Professional Learning Package<sup>730</sup> intended for secondary education pupils as well. The package makes the distinction between three types, that is 'in the class room' learning, 'beyond the class room' learning and 'participation in the community' learning for which modules have been developed. In EU terms this can be defined as formal, informal and non-formal learning contexts, being the scope of the Key Competences Framework.

The Australian learning package offers three modules to foster 'civics and citizenship', respectively 'in the class room', 'beyond the class room' and 'participation in the community' and intends to 'educate' knowledge, skills and dispositions (which can be explained as an artificial habit, a preparation, a state of readiness, or a tendency to act in a specified way that may be learned). Actually the modules can be read as the EQF for Lifelong Learning categories: knowledge, skills and (wider) competences, the latter defining an active role. Key items digested from the learning outcomes (which have been defined for these modules) are: democracy and social cohesion, values and principles, rights and responsibilities, social and political issues, fair processes for participation and decision making, awareness of self-held beliefs and values. Interesting is also that many of the competences that have been formulated for upper secondary education can easily be applied to HE, because clear level indicators are lacking. Blooms' verbs model does not help in this instance. What to make of: engaging, developing, defining and exercising, recognising and understanding, identifying, applying, creating, fostering, raising, having and building?

In March 2016 the Council of Europe published *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*.<sup>731</sup>

<sup>729</sup> European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document. Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning {COM(2018) 24 final} Brussels, 17.1.2018. The 2006 edition distinguishes 8 key competences, the new proposal also includes 8 key competences : Literacy competence; Languages competence; Science, technological, engineering and mathematical competence; Digital competence; Personal, social and learning competence; Civic competence; Entrepreneurship competence; and Cultural awareness and expression competence. The 2006 edition identified the following eight key competences: Communication in the mother tongue; Communication in foreign languages; Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; Digital competence; Learning to learn; Social and civic competences; Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and Cultural awareness and expression.

<sup>730</sup> Australian Government, Civics & Citizenship Education Professional Learning Package (2010): [http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/DEEWR\\_CCE\\_PLP.pdf](http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/verve/_resources/DEEWR_CCE_PLP.pdf)

<sup>731</sup> Council of Europe, *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*. Strasbourg, 2016. Full report: [REFORM!  
TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe.  
A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning](https://rm.coe.int/CoERM-</a></p>
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The publication offers a conceptual model of 20 generic competences clustered in four groups: values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding. By values is meant human dignity and human rights, cultural diversity, valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law. The label attitudes encompass openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices as well as civic-mindedness, responsibility, self-efficacy and tolerance of ambiguity. As skills have been identified autonomous learning, analytical and critical thinking, listening and observing, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, co-operation, conflict-resolution and linguistic, communicative and plurilingual abilities. The knowledge category lists knowledge and critical understanding of the self, knowledge and understanding of language and communication as well as the world, in terms of politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment and sustainability.

From this list it is obvious that competences relevant for employability overlap with those for civic engagement. It shows that combining both employability and civic, social and cultural engagement in the 'wider competences' parameter/category is a sensible way forward. The list of 20 generic competences chosen by the Council of Europe is based on a longer list of 55 identified in 101 competences schemes. Each of the 20 competences is clarified in the document and supported by a number of pre-assumptions, ranging from 3 to 12 statements. They offer clarity about what is expected of a citizen in a democratic culture. Taken together, these statements should be measurable.<sup>732</sup>

Finally, an Educational Testing Service (ETS) research group also studied the issue. Its report published in 2015 by Judith Torney Puta, at al., *Assessing civic competency and engagement. Research background, Frameworks, and Directions for Next-Generation Assessment. Research Report*<sup>733</sup> stipulates that civic learning is increasingly recognized as being important by both the Higher Education sector and workforce communities. It offers a review of the outcomes of some 30 projects covering 'existing frameworks, definitions and assessments of civic related-constructs'. Already this number shows how hot the issue is in

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PublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806ccc07; See also: Council of Europe, REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE. Volume 1 Context, concepts and model. Strasbourg, April 2018; Council of Europe, REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE. Volume 2. Descriptors of competences for democratic culture. Strasbourg, April 2018; Council of Europe, REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE. Volume 3: Guidance for implementation. Strasbourg, April 2018.

<sup>732</sup> Council of Europe, *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*. Strasbourg, 2016, 28-19 and Appendix B.

<sup>733</sup> Torney Puta, J., a.o., *Assessing civic competency and engagement. Research background, Frameworks, and Directions for Next-Generation Assessment. Research Report*. Princeton: ETS publication, 2015. Retrieved from: [http://www.ets.org/research/policy\\_research\\_reports/publications/report/2015/jvdz](http://www.ets.org/research/policy_research_reports/publications/report/2015/jvdz)



particular the USA. The number of civic competency and engagement frameworks identified outside the USA is limited. The ETS group identified a total of 31 competences ranging from civic literacy, civic engagement, civic identity, political knowledge, civic knowledge and skills, ethical and social responsibility in a diverse world, civic-mindedness and civic responsibility to political and civic participation. It also addresses the term ‘civic learning’ in terms of learning outcomes in the Lumina US Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) both at associate level (level 5 of the EQF) and at bachelor level.<sup>734</sup> This DQP can be compared to the European overarching qualifications frameworks. The ETS study offers a table of ‘existing assessments measuring civic competency and engagement’ and comes up with its own framework, distinguishing between the civic competency domain (covering civic knowledge, analytical skills, participatory and involvement skills) and the civic engagement domain (covering motivations, attitudes and efficacy, democratic norms and values and participation and activities). These competences are defined and completed with measurable topics/ learning outcomes. The report concludes with examples of so-called ‘test item formats’ (tasks types) to assess civic competency and engagement.

These publications – together with others<sup>735</sup> – offered a good basis for CALOHEE to give substance to frame the topic of ‘civic, social and cultural engagement’ in higher education. Taking the current developments as described in this section as a foundation, four dimensions were identified, which together should make the CALOHEE reference framework of general descriptors for this topic. These four are seen as the minimum to be covered in all higher education programmes. As in the case of the domain/ subject area reference frameworks each dimension includes a ‘knowledge’ descriptor, a ‘skills’ descriptor and a ‘responsibility and autonomy’ (wider competence) descriptor. The CALOHEE reference framework model contains four dimensions:

1. Societies and Cultures: Interculturalism;
2. Processes of information and communication;
3. Processes of governance and decision making;
4. Ethics, norms, values and professional standards.

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<sup>734</sup> Lumina Foundation, *Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP). A learning-centered framework for what college graduates should know and be able to do to earn the associate, bachelor’s or master’s degree*. Indianapolis, October 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/dqp.pdf>

<sup>735</sup> H. Anne Weiss, *Assessment of Students’ Civic Learning and Development*. Indiana Campus Compact July 15, 2016. Retrieved 05-10-2018 from: <https://compact.org/resource-posts/assessment-of-students-civic-learning-and-development/>; Council of Europe, *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*. Strasbourg, 2016: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806ccc07>

Together, they cover very many of the items as included in the European key competences framework, the Australian learning package, the Council of Europe paper, the ETS framework as well as a number of documents related to ethics and professional standards<sup>736</sup> and the publication of the DARE+ project coordinated by the University of Granada<sup>737</sup>. Reflections on these documents have resulted in the following reference framework:

*Table 2: CALOHEE Reference Framework for Civic, Social and Cultural Engagement*

	Knowledge	Skills	Responsibility and autonomy (Wider competences)
1.	Demonstrate critical understanding of <b>communalities and differences in and between societies and cultures</b>	Identify, describe and analyse issues in and between societies and cultures	Demonstrate engagement by developing scenarios and alternatives and/or identifying best practices of interaction between societies and cultures and – if required – interventions in case of tensions and/or conflicts
2.	Demonstrate critical understanding of the <b>processes of information and communication</b>	Review and judge (mis) use of sources, data, evidence, qualities, intentions and transparency and expert opinions	Active contribution to societal debates using reliable data and information sources and informed judgements

<sup>736</sup> CFA Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Conduct; NSPE Code of Ethics for Engineers; Code of Professional Ethics for Compliance and Ethics Professionals; Annelies De Schrijver, Jeroen Maesschalk, A new definition and conceptualization of ethical competence, in: D. Menzel and T. Cooper, eds., *Achieving ethical competence for public service leadership*. Armonk (NY): M.E. Sharpe, 2013, pp. 29-51: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424837\\_A\\_new\\_definition\\_and\\_conceptualization\\_of\\_ethical\\_competence?enrichId=rgreq-e91c3596703196efd22e56417c65ff71-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzI2MzQyNDgzNztBUzoxNTQyNjMzODA1NjYwMTdAMTQxMz-c5MDY2NDA2Ng%3D%3D&el=1\\_x\\_2&\\_esc=publicationCoverPdf](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424837_A_new_definition_and_conceptualization_of_ethical_competence?enrichId=rgreq-e91c3596703196efd22e56417c65ff71-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzI2MzQyNDgzNztBUzoxNTQyNjMzODA1NjYwMTdAMTQxMz-c5MDY2NDA2Ng%3D%3D&el=1_x_2&_esc=publicationCoverPdf)

<sup>737</sup> Maria Yarosh, Anna Serbati and Aidan Seery, eds., *Developing Generic Competences Outside the University Classroom*. Granada, 2017.

	Knowledge	Skills	Responsibility and autonomy (Wider competences)
3.	Demonstrate critical understanding of the <b>processes of governance and decision making</b>	Apply and support agreed governing principles, norms and values regarding fairness, transparency, accountability, democracy and relevance in policy making processes	Active contribution to and with local and (inter) national communities, community groups, (political) organisations and pressure groups respecting agreed principles, norms and values
4.	Demonstrate critical understanding of general <b>ethical principles, norms and values and professional standards</b>	Understand and apply the processes of decision making and the consequences of actions taking into account principles, norms, values and standards both from a personal and a professional standpoint.	Active contribution to upholding, promoting and defending general ethical principles, norms, values and professional standards in governance, communication and cultural interaction.

*Table prepared by a CALOHEE ad-hoc experts' group consisting in alphabetic order of Pablo Beneitone, Julia González, Alfredo Soeiro, Ingrid van der Meer, Robert Wagenaar and Maria Yarosh.*

The descriptors included in this framework have not been related to a particular level, that is a first or second cycle (BA or MA). Because it might be expected that every first cycle graduate should be able to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and wider competences identified in this table, it seems obvious to link the table to level 6 of the EQF for Lifelong Learning, that is the first cycle of the QF for the EHEA. The framework is presented here as a supplementary stand-alone one and could as such be added to any subject area conceptual framework as four additional (general) dimensions. However, CALOHEE has suggested to *integrate* the identified items in the subject area based frameworks.

### **From qualifications reference frameworks to assessment reference frameworks**

When preparing CALOHEE, the initiators realized that developing one-page subject area based qualifications reference frameworks was only a first step in the process to defining an instrument that would allow for measuring and comparing learning. This process and aim required more detailed 'assessment reference frameworks'. Although a qualifications reference framework is a good rep-

resentation of a particular subject area, its descriptors are formulated in such a way that they are too general to be measurable.

Because the term assessment reference framework can have different meanings, some clarification is offered. On the one hand it may refer to an instrument used as a basis for an accreditation procedure, that is to check whether a study programme meets minimum quality standards.<sup>738</sup> On the other, it can also be understood as a framework which offers a detailed scheme or schedule of phases in an assessment process, including the different approaches to be used with respect to the course units/modules that form a particular study programme.<sup>739</sup> The teaching staff involved in such a programme is expected to respect this scheme when implementing the programme. It should offer a well thought through and balanced structure for assessment of the different programme components.

In the case of CALOHEE, ‘assessment reference framework’ has a third meaning. It is a table that contains measurable learning outcomes or descriptors based on a subject area qualifications reference framework having more precise subsets of each one of them. Each subset, taken together, describes in some detail the key elements and topics covered by a learning outcome statement. In addition, the Tuning-CALOHEE Assessment Reference Framework intends to offer insight into the most appropriate strategies and approaches to assessing the constituent elements of each learning outcome. The term is used in CALOHEE in the same way as in the OECD AHELO feasibility study, where assessment frameworks were defined for the disciplinary fields of Economics and Civil Engineering, based on the respective Tuning AHELO conceptual frameworks for those two subject areas.<sup>740</sup> To avoid misunderstandings, the Tuning-CALOHEE Assessment Reference Frameworks are not meant as ‘written in stone’, but offer a menu from which substantiated choices can be made, which should respect the disciplinary core.

<sup>738</sup> ECA, *Assessment Frameworks for Joint Programmes* (2014). Retrieved 19-10-2016: [http://ecahe.eu/w/images/e/e6/Assessment\\_framework\\_for\\_joint\\_programmes\\_in\\_single\\_accreditation\\_procedures\\_-\\_ECA.pdf](http://ecahe.eu/w/images/e/e6/Assessment_framework_for_joint_programmes_in_single_accreditation_procedures_-_ECA.pdf)

<sup>739</sup> University of Nottingham. *Teaching and Learning. Assessment Framework*. Retrieved 21-11-2016: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/teaching/assessmentfeedback/assessmentframework.aspx>

<sup>740</sup> OECD, *Economics Assessment Framework. AHELO Feasibility Study* (April 2012). Retrieved 21-11-2016: [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne\(2011\)19/ANN3/FINAL&doclanguage=en\\_](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne(2011)19/ANN3/FINAL&doclanguage=en_)

OECD. *Engineering Assessment Framework. AHELO Feasibility Study*. (January 2012). Retrieved 26-11-2016: [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne\(2011\)19/ANN5/FINAL&doclanguage=en](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=edu/imhe/ahelo/gne(2011)19/ANN5/FINAL&doclanguage=en)

OECD, *Tuning-AHELO Conceptual Framework of Expected and Desired Learning Outcomes in Economics*. OECD Education Working Papers, No.59, OECD Publishing (Paris), 2011.

OECD, *Tuning-AHELO Conceptual Framework of Expected/ Desired Learning Outcomes in Engineering*. OECD Education Working Papers, No.60, OECD Publishing (Paris), 2011.

As a next target CALOHEE developed these ‘assessment reference frameworks’ for both first and second cycle degree programmes (bachelors and the masters) in each of the subject areas involved as part of its project. The Tuning-CALOHEE Assessment Reference Framework follows the format of the subject area based qualifications reference frameworks and therefore comprises easily read reference tables containing more detailed descriptors that cover knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy (wider competences) again. These detailed and therefore much longer tables are an integral part of the *Tuning Guidelines and Reference Points 2018 for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes*, already mentioned.

According to CALOHEE the advantages of assessment reference framework are numerous. Such a framework provides:

- A widely accepted comprehensive overview of the key learning topics a degree programme can include, being developed by an international group of experts, and validated by peers and other stakeholders.
- A range of up-to-date strategies, methodologies and approaches to learn, teach and assess the topics of learning, formulated in terms of learning outcomes.
- Different stakeholder groups’ insight into what could be usually covered in terms of learning in a particular subject area and a particular degree programme. Stakeholders include disciplinary experts, teaching staff, university and faculty management, professional organizations, employers and (potential) students.
- A menu through which an individual degree programme at bachelor or master level can be composed and defined on the basis of motivated and articulated choices and a transparent decision-making process.
- A fair indicator of the completeness and quality of a degree programme which allows for different institutional missions and profiles.
- A reliable mechanism for quality assurance based on a robust reference framework with well-defined sets of measurable learning outcomes.
- A format for comparing different degree programmes in terms of profile, content and approach.
- A robust and articulated framework for developing comparable diagnostic assessments which offer reliable evidence regarding the strengths and weaknesses of a particular degree programme, benchmarked against programmes with comparable missions and profiles.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> List taken from Robert Wagenaar, Skills and Learning Gain(s) in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Higher education: Politics or Policy? In: Brendan Cantwell, Hamish Coates, and Roger King, eds., *Handbook on the Politics of Higher Education*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2018, 515-516.

A CALOHEE's assessment reference framework should be perceived as a table providing an overview of the subject area in terms of measurable learning outcomes statements. These statements, in conjunction, are much more precise than the more general reference points descriptors of the subject area involved. The focus in the framework is not only on 'what to learn', but also on 'how' this 'what' can be learned. It is a representation of the lowest, but at the same time most detailed, level in the hierarchy of qualifications reference frameworks.

While the general descriptors have the primary aim of indicating the type and level of learning, in an assessment reference framework these are broken down using sub-descriptors or subsets based on sub-dimensions which describe the key elements and topics that constitute each descriptor in greater detail. Although the general descriptors are often called learning outcomes, in practice they are much more competence statements, because they are meant to be general. The real, utilizable, learning outcomes of a subject area are the sub-descriptors, because they meet the condition of being measurable, indicating not only a subject, but also context and complexity. The dimensions, sub-dimensions, descriptors and sub-descriptors together make an assessment reference framework. It is complimented by an overview of the most appropriate learning, teaching and assessment strategies and approaches to achieve the intended learning outcomes. These can be formulated per sub-dimension but are more often formulated for several related sub-descriptors in order to avoid repetition.<sup>742</sup> The assessment reference framework is conditional for defining an instrument that allows for actual testing in comparative perspective.

## Developing a model for comparative testing

Earlier the question was raised whether students enrolled in higher education around Europe develop the competences they need. This question can be followed up by two others: Are degree programmes delivering what they promise? Can we learn to compare student's achievements in different countries in a meaningful way? These are again relevant questions because of the amount of money involved in higher education for governments as well as for families and the students concerned. The notion of cost-benefit that is applied throughout

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<sup>742</sup> CALOHEE, Subject Area based Assessment Frameworks. *Discussion Paper on the design of Assessment Frameworks based on Sectoral and Subject Area Qualifications Frameworks*. (2016); Robert Wagenaar, What do we know – What should we know? Measuring and comparing achievements of learning in European Higher Education: initiating the new CALOHEE approach, in: Olga Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Miriam Toepper, Hans Anand Pant, Corinna Lautenbach and Christine Kuhn, eds. *Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education*. Cross-National Comparisons and Perspectives. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.

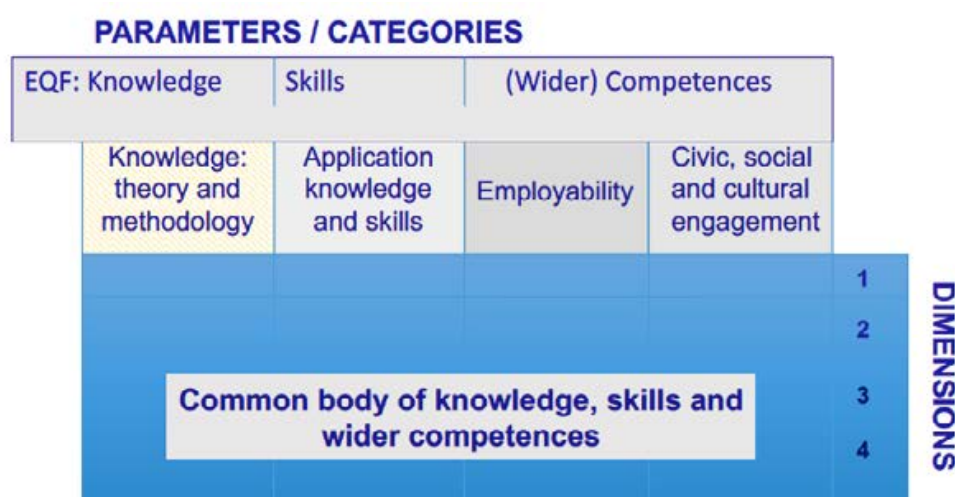
society nowadays, also applies to the higher education sector. In response to this issue, CALOHEE set as its ultimate aim the development of an actual measurement instrument. These actual tests or assessments and their underpinning frameworks should offer insight into whether the outcomes of learning match the investments made, with the argument that the 'proof is in the eating of the pudding'. Assessments for each of the five subject areas to be developed in the near future are intended to use a similar methodology but they shall be tailored to the characteristics of each field of studies, thus enabling a comparison of students' performance in a Europe-wide context. For budgetary reasons it is expected that a start will be made with developing test item banks for two out of the five CALOHEE subject areas first.

In the philosophy of CALOHEE these assessments will necessarily be multi-dimensional in order to allow for precise and fair measurement, taking into account the different missions, orientations and profiles of institutions and degree programmes. The outcomes of the assessments should not only offer institutions useful information to verify whether their students are achieving internationally defined standards of generic and subject specific learning outcomes and are prepared sufficiently well for their role in society in terms of personal development, employability and civic, social and cultural engagement. Both the underpinning frameworks and the assessments intend to provide important information to the students themselves, so that they can understand better the aims and objectives of their programmes and the competences they will gain, and become proactive in the learning process. The frameworks and assessments have been designed in such a way as to stimulate academics to reform as well as to check that learning, teaching and assessment methods are truly aligned with the stated desired outcomes. Finally, the frameworks and the (outcomes of) assessments should play a key role in quality enhancement and assurance at degree programme level. Although actual comparative assessment is the ultimate aim, by developing the subject area qualifications reference frameworks and their related assessment reference frameworks already now a set of instruments is available which allows for referencing degree programmes against much better indicators than were available so far.

In order to accommodate the different missions and profiles of higher education institutions and their programmes, CALOHEE developed an assessment model which is based on four parameters or categories. This is fully compatible with the existing Tuning-CALOHEE sectoral/ subject area qualifications reference frameworks whose core is formed by the grid or table of descriptors/learning outcomes. As the following image illustrates the four parameters of assessment are related to the three 'domains of learning': 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'responsibility and autonomy' (wider competences). The last strand is split into two: employability and civic, social and cultural engagement. It illustrates the relevance

for discussing and developing ‘competency frameworks’ for the world of work and civic, social and cultural engagement.

Image 1: CALOHEE assessment model



### Assessment framework

The distinction in parameters or categories is made for reasons of clarity, although it must be kept in mind that the four strands are closely interrelated, as are the three learning domains in the EQF for Lifelong Learning and the five or six dimensions in the QF for the EHEA.

The first parameter encompasses the core knowledge of a particular academic field as well as the related theoretical concepts and methodologies which are judged essential for a good understanding of that field. The depth to which this knowledge and its understanding is developed in a programme depends on the type of degree programme and type of institution offering it. For example, in the case of a research intensive institution, deep knowledge of theoretical concepts and methodologies in relation to highly developed analytical competences/skills and critical thinking will be considered essential. While the outcomes of the Tuning surveys have shown that stakeholders consider the ability to apply knowledge and skills in practice – the second strand – very important in preparing for a societal role, in the case of a research intensive institution the focus will be much stronger on the first strand. The balance will be different in the case of a university of applied science or a more applied degree programme. However, the Tuning-CALOHEE Assessment Reference Framework will indicate the optimum achievement level in both categories (for both BA and MA), that is the highest level achievable and feasible for a higher education degree programme.



This means that students are not all expected to achieve the highest levels formulated as ‘intended’ learning outcomes in the framework. The norm of achievement – threshold, average, above average, excellent – with regard to each of the parameters will depend on the type of programme taken by the student, as well as its aims. This approach, which can be compared to the tests used to select pupils/students for different types of secondary and higher education, does justice to CALOHEE’s multi-dimensional approach. It also takes into account that in national and international contexts a distinction is made between more and less ‘prestigious’ universities or other types of higher education institutions if these exist (grand écoles, skola normal, etc.). Although all these institutions will offer bachelor and/or master programmes (or their equivalents) it does not mean that they are understood to be of the same higher education ‘type’ or ‘level’. This is why it is so important to distinguish profiles and missions of institutions, each of which have an intrinsic value and place and role in the higher education landscape, but therefore also higher education institutions have the obligation to describe and justify the choices they make.

Once the ‘optimum’ feasible learning outcomes are defined, it is essential to make subdivisions that reflect the different profiles of higher education institutions and programmes in an appropriate manner. These should also be the basis for deciding the norms to use when comparative assessments are organized. In order to avoid complicating the model excessively, it is proposed to develop two main subdivisions (research based and applied), which can be further split into two subsets, so as to distinguish level. This would provide grids for four types of degree programmes, having partially different programme learning outcomes and taking into account more academic and more professional orientations. All types, however, are expected to cover the identified common body of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy (wider competences) and all students are expected to meet a threshold level to be identified and agreed upon by the academic communities responsible.

### **Topics of assessment (and teaching and learning)**

Keeping the proposed four parameters, strands, dimensions and the main subdivision and its subsets in mind, the actual testing is based on the assessment reference framework concerned. Test items are related to the sub-dimensions or sub-sets and sub-descriptors, a breakdown of the dimensions and descriptors defined for the particular subject area. The model is visualised by image 2: Structure of the assessment reference framework.

Image 2: Structure of the assessment reference framework

Dimension	Knowledge descriptor	Skills descriptor	(Wider) Competence descriptor
1.	Sub-descriptor 1-1	Sub-descriptor 1-2	Sub-descriptor 1-3
2.	Sub-descriptor 2-1	Sub-descriptor 2-2	Sub-descriptor 2-3
3.	Sub-descriptor 3-1	Sub-descriptor 3-2	Sub-descriptor 3-3
4.	Sub-descriptor 4-1	Sub-descriptor 4-2	Sub-descriptor 4-3
5.	Sub-descriptor 5-1	Sub-descriptor 5-2	Sub-descriptor 5-3

To make this model more concrete, the following table is presented which offers the assessment reference framework for the first dimension of the History qualifications reference framework: ‘the human being: cultures and societies’. It illustrates well the progression in learning covered by the three domains of learning: the knowledge, skills and responsibilities and autonomy components. It also shows that the third column indeed meets the requirements of the ‘competency frameworks’ for operating successfully in society, both in terms of preparing for work and civic, social and cultural engagement.

Table 3: Assessment Reference Framework Template First Cycle – LEVEL 6

DIMENSION 1: HUMAN BEINGS: CULTURES AND SOCIETIES			
	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences)</i>
<b>L6_1. Level descriptor</b>	<b>K6_1</b> Demonstrate basic knowledge and critical insight into changes and continuities in human conditions, environment, experience, institutions, modes of expression, ideas and values in diachronic and synchronic perspective.	<b>S6_1</b> Drawing on knowledge of history, identify and define, with guidance, significant problems and areas of enquiry with respect to social and cultural interaction.	<b>C6_1</b> Apply historical knowledge and perspectives in addressing present day issues, bringing to bear analytical understanding and respect for individuals and groups in their personal, cultural and social dimension.

<b>DIMENSION 1: HUMAN BEINGS: CULTURES AND SOCIETIES</b>			
	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences)</i>
<b>Subset 1</b> L6_1.1 Historical interpretation of changes and continuities	K6_1.1 Show general acquaintance with diverse criteria of historical explanation and understanding on different time- and spatial scales. Demonstrate awareness of how explanations and interpretations are conceptualized.	S6_1.1 Formulate historical explanations and interpretations of phenomena and processes through comparison and differentiation using quantitative and qualitative methods.	C6_1.1 Recognize consistent interrelations concerning phenomena and processes of different nature and scale, at the same time showing awareness of their uniqueness.
<b>Subset 2</b> L6_1.2 Environmental transformations and knowledge development	K6_1.2 Relate social and economic change to environmental transformations and to the accumulation/modification of knowledge.	S6_1.2 Describe the interaction between the natural environment and social change, on the one hand, and knowledge production on the other.	C6_1.2 Evaluate the impact of knowledge production and accumulation on society and the environment, and vice-versa.
<b>Subset 3</b> L6_1.3 Power relations and organization	K6_1.3 Demonstrate knowledge about the development of power relations and how they shape collective organizations, institutions and representations of the world through conflict, negotiation, and adaptation.	S6_1.3 Recognize tools and mechanisms of power in societal and collective relations and their genesis, continuity and transformations in time.	C6_1.3 Contribute to discussions and debates on power relations and political organization in a broad sense, placing them in historical perspective.
<b>Subset 4</b> L6_1.4 Knowledge, culture, religious beliefs and practices	K6_1.4 Demonstrate knowledge about modes of expression and transmission of knowledge and culture, including beliefs and practices concerning moral values, immaterial and transcendental concerns and narratives, and their dynamics.	S6_1.4 Describe different conceptual frameworks, symbolic representations and discourses that underpin and support collectively held beliefs and related practices	C6_1.4 Engage critically with the dynamics of collective beliefs and practices and how they are expressed by individuals and groups.

<b>DIMENSION 1: HUMAN BEINGS: CULTURES AND SOCIETIES</b>			
	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Autonomy and Responsibility (Wider Competences)</i>
<b>Subset 5</b> L6_1.5 Intercultural encounters	K6_1.5 Demonstrate knowledge about inter-cultural encounters and their consequences on every field of human activities and on personal and collective identities.	S6_1.5 Describe and illustrate different dimensions (e.g. social, economic, religious, and political) in cultural encounters via comparison and connections of specific cases, and be able to collaborate effectively in a multicultural context.	C6_1.5 Contribute to understanding and respect for individuals and groups in their personal, cultural, economic and political and social dimension; conduct critical appraisal of conflicting views and facilitate intercultural mediation.

*Table prepared by the members of the CALOHEE Subject Area Group of History, July 2018*

Each sub-descriptor describes – in the form of a learning outcomes statement – a core element or topic constituting the respective ‘knowledge descriptor’, the ‘skills descriptor’ and the ‘autonomy and responsibility’ (wider competence) descriptor. These sub-descriptors can be compared to the learning outcomes statements as defined for the ‘highest’ of a range of successive units or modules in a degree programme (a so-called ‘learning string’), defining the level to be achieved. The sub-descriptors have been formulated in such a way that they can not only be measured, but also be learned and taught. Like descriptors, sub-descriptors should be appropriate for the cycle (BA and MA) for which they are defined. To secure an appropriate balance, the CALOHEE working groups developed the cycle level descriptors at the same time, to secure a fair balance.

As part of the process of defining the assessment reference frameworks the five CALOHEE subject area groups also identified matching examples of appropriate learning, teaching and assessment approaches, methodologies and techniques. As a preparation and to obtain a more up-to-date overview of the current approaches applied, questionnaires were distributed regarding modes of teaching and learning and on modes of assessment among the CALOHEE membership. The questionnaire also asked to identify modes of assessment to ‘measure’ competence development for a set of key generic competences. The outcomes of the survey show that mostly rather traditional assessment forms are being applied. As far as the assessment of generic competences is concerned, the outcomes of the survey showed a rather ambiguous picture because the respondents had no

clear ideas on which modes could be best applied. This confirms earlier findings that the student-centred approach has not been implemented widely yet. It is relevant to mention here that of the 101 respondents 97 % confirmed that their institution is representative for their country, as is 93 % of their degree programmes.<sup>743</sup> It confirmed the need for examples of 'good practice' to be identified by the subject area groups as part of the process of preparing the 2018 editions of the Tuning reference points brochures.

The exercise has resulted in examples of good practice that focus on the level of a dimension and in a number of cases even the level of sub-dimension.<sup>744</sup> These involve a variety of current learning, teaching and assessment strategies and approaches, which allow for achieving the descriptors as included in the subject area based qualifications reference frameworks and the related assessment reference frameworks. This has completed a new set of Tuning instruments that should contribute significantly to giving the reform of higher education programmes a new boost. By offering this material CALOHEE has not only offered insight into the question 'what do we know', but most of all 'what should we know' to operate successfully in society. It has also indicated why and how the 'what' can be learned, taught and measured. A next step will be to check whether the 'should we know' is accomplished by the higher education sector and its academics and students. This will require transnational comparative assessments according to the outlined CALOHEE assessment model.

In AHELO, two more traditional formats were applied for assessment, that is multiple choice tests and constructive response tests of which the latter required man-power based assessments. For reasons of reliability, efficiency and cost effectiveness CALOHEE intends to strive for machine based testing only. Conditional is that this type of testing allows for the assessment of profound knowledge and understanding, as well as high level skills. One should think of critical awareness, analysing and composition skills for example. This implies that formats should be developed and applied which make it possible to facilitate text interpretation and analysis, but also to identify best strategies and methodologies for solving a problem. This will require the application of new forms of (statistical) measurement methods and validation approaches for assessment, which are still in the process of development. It is expected that the use of algorithms will revolutionize computerised assessments. It can build on already available forms of assessment, such as responding to and analysing footage and computer simulation. Also strategic computer games technology can be of service. Given the speed at which technology is developing, the perspectives are

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<sup>743</sup> CALOHEE, Outcomes Questionnaire Modes of Assessment, in: *Meeting document Second General Meeting, Porto, 18-19 November 2016*, 9-40.

<sup>744</sup> Robert Wagenaar, ed., *Tuning-CALOHEE Assessment Reference Frameworks for Civil Engineering, Teacher Education, History, Nursing, Physics*. Groningen, 2018.

quite promising, and will allow for forms of comparative measuring that not many could foresee almost a decade ago when AHELO was launched. That it is possible no longer seems to be an issue, rather the question is *when* it will be possible to measure that we really know *what we should know* after a process of learning.

Ultimately, comparative international assessments are expected to offer the evidence to society whether or not higher education institutions are doing their job well, and whether capital and time have been spent well. This seems to be the most reliable form of quality assurance in absolute terms, but it is also a learning mechanism for all governing levels related to the higher sector. This may require additional policy-making by politicians and higher education management. CALOHEE has shown once more that policy-making is a multi-level and multi-actor process which requires commitment of all levels and actors involved.

## In conclusion

In 2018 it is no longer disputed that the role of higher education is to make students not only knowledgeable but also skilled. This is required in order to make a significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural welfare of society. This implies ownership of a skills and competence set that is not only related to a subject area, but also covers generic skills and competences. As has been established, skills gaps and mismatches relate to (inter)disciplinary knowledge, but most of all to high-level skills and competences. The overarching European and national qualifications frameworks that have been developed – with obvious policy objectives in mind – offer general descriptors of what is expected to be learned and at what level. Being general by definition these are insufficient indicators of what ‘should be learned’ to meet the needs of society. Tuning had good reasons for establishing the CALOHEE project. Its subject area reference points documents and qualifications reference frameworks or meta-profiles were not only insufficiently aligned with the overarching frameworks, but also with current developments in society. Furthermore, there was the frustration at the level of policy makers and the Tuning expert group that the Bologna reform process around 2015 was stuck.

To set the agenda again it reached back to the governing model it had applied successfully when implementing Tuning in the years 2001-2008, that is making politics at European level by using the instruments and support of the European Commission and the commitment and involvement of European university networks and relevant organisations, higher education institutions and their academics. In other words, it applied once more a bottom-up approach to develop

Europe-wide instruments. This proved once more a successful formula. CALOHEE indeed delivered the instruments it planned for: updated guidelines and reference documents for five key subject areas, state of the art qualifications reference frameworks fully aligned with a merger of the two European overarching frameworks, related assessment reference frameworks based on well-defined and measurable learning outcomes statements and a model for transnational comparative measurement of learning outcomes.

Key and innovative in these documents is the focus on ‘competency frameworks’ for bridging higher education programmes and the workplace much better, as well as for seriously preparing graduates for civic, social and cultural engagement. This should be perceived as a tremendous step forward, and well matching initiatives of other organisations. This is the first time in which subject area reference frameworks – which are the core for quality assurance but also the recognition of learning – focus on present and future needs by answering the questions ‘what should be learned?’ and ‘how should this learning be organised?’.

When setting-up CALOHEE it took the lessons learned from the OECD-AHELO feasibility study as its point of departure. The main lesson was that a completely different kind of approach would be required both in governing terms as the actual approach to be applied, to be successful. AHELO showed that a top-down approach, a project steered by an international organisation with support of national governments without guaranteeing the commitment of lower policy levels, – higher education institutions and their academic staff-, did not work. At least in this particular case it did not lead to an applicable and replicable model for defining and measuring quality in an international context. Another flaw, avoided by CALOHEE, was the separation of a subject specific strand and a generic strand. According to the Tuning expert group the training of generic competences always requires a domain of knowledge. Its approach was accordingly. The subject area based qualifications reference frameworks and assessment reference frameworks developed by CALOHEE, show full integration of the knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy components.

What is in place now is an infrastructure which allows for each higher education institution, to reference its degree programmes offered, in particular in the five subject areas covered by the CALOHEE feasibility study, against internationally defined standards. Standards, which not only define quality but also the relevance of learning in the world of today and tomorrow.





## Conclusion

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The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 symbolizes that developing ‘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’, requires alignment of education and training systems. A crucial factor in this vision is the intense international cooperation between higher education institutions and their academic staffs. Creativity and innovation condition international cooperation, as the construction of a car or an airplane does. This cooperation is highly stimulated by the EU framework programmes for both research and education, but takes place outside the direct purview of national authorities. The *Magna Charta Universitatum* (1988), which has been accepted by EU governments as a good expression of university autonomy, stipulates that this should be the case, with academic freedom being an axiom.

Acknowledging this freedom, the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations were prepared for good reasons. European higher education was system-wise simply too diverse, not sufficiently attractive in content terms, and it was not in accordance with new concepts of learning, teaching and assessment to compete successfully with other major providers of higher education, such as Australia, Canada and the United States. As the European Commission noted in its green and white papers, it was also not preparing very well for the world of work and society. Furthermore, there was rightly a concern about the cost-benefit of higher education, with high drop-out rates and studies taking longer than scheduled in many European countries. Programmes were very much knowledge oriented, and did not take skills and competence development very seriously.

In 1998 and 1999 respectively, the signatories of the Sorbonne and Bologna Declaration set clear targets and identified action points. They had reasons to do so, their systems having to deal with growing numbers of students and fixed budget ceilings. International cooperation was welcomed as leverage for reform. As has been shown in this book there was no doubt at European level and the level of national state that there was a need for reform. The urgency differed per country, but for all countries brain gain versus brain drain played a role. Initially, the focus of what would become the Bologna Process was on the system level, the introduction of a two cycle, somewhat later three cycle, system, a shared model for ‘quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies’ and the ‘establishment of a system of credits’.

In retrospect, twenty years of Bologna Process and the development of a European Higher Education Area has been an intriguing experience. This is due to its governance model and principles, the debates about conceptual terminology, as well as its actual implementation. Although the European Commission had stressed the need for reforms for years, the whole process, starting with the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, nevertheless came as a surprise. That four countries identified common ground was more or less by co-incidence. The signing of the Sorbonne Declaration had not been preceded by careful preparation and planning. Rather, it had been a fast job. Personal ambitions – if only to receive an honorary degree of the Sorbonne University – played a role. France, Italy, Germany and the UK all had their individual challenges for which their ministers wanted to find solutions. Three out of four countries had to deal with rather inflexible and inefficient systems. In particular the UK and Germany, and to a lesser extent also France, had the ambition to protect and enhance their attractiveness in the global higher education arena.

Most remarkable is that this initiative was taken completely outside the realm of the European Union institutions. Initially, this was not understood and appreciated by the other EU member states. Careful policy manoeuvring was required to align the EU member states again, by bringing both the ministers of education and the directors-general for (higher) education together. The two European Conferences of Rectors, which would merge in 2001 in the European University Association, oiled the process. They had their own agenda.

What made the initiative even more special is the enmity that was shown by some of the Sorbonne Declaration signatory countries towards the European Commission and its institutions. This remained a constant factor, even when the initiative had become a process involving another 23 countries, only less than half of which were EU member states. It developed into an axiom to keep the European Commission at a distance. Only in 2001 the Commission became a formal member of the governing body, the Bologna Follow-up Group. This resulted in a model that can be compared to the intergovernmental policy forum, the G8 (at the time) with the EU involved as a “unenumerated” participant.

The combination of preparing the Bologna Declaration according to a typical European Union format, that is a working group of European Union countries, stressing its voluntary character, and only then inviting non-European Union countries – although they were EEA countries and candidate countries – to sign-up for its agenda made the whole endeavour rather peculiar. The idea of turning a declaration into a process developed only after its signing, and led to an intergovernmental steering model. As has been stipulated, the choice for the governing approach was gradually made. Selected was the ‘Open Method of Coordination’, which had been introduced originally in 1992 in the setting of the Maastricht Treaty and applied in 1997 in the Luxembourg Process or European Employment

Strategy (EES), both European Union initiatives. It was again highlighted in the setting of the Lisbon Strategy when it got the eye of the national officials involved in the Bologna agenda. A better choice would probably have been a multi-level / multi-actor model, which was formulated as a theoretical framework in 2001, but in practice already used by Tuning from 2000, having learned from the ECTS experience. Such a governing model would have allowed for the alignment of other levels of policy-making much more than the one-dimensional Open Method of Coordination, and therefore would have done better justice to the character of the multi-faceted and multi-level Bologna Process.

As has been outlined in different chapters of this book, countries persistently stressed that education, including higher education, was (and continues to be) a responsibility of the nation state, not of the European Union, and therefore it is not part of the different treaties underpinning the EU. This is reflected in the responses to the many education related initiatives taken by the European Commission since the 1980s, including the ERASMUS programme. It is also reflected in the Sorbonne Declaration and the Bologna Declaration. In the latter, the European Commission is not even mentioned, although it unintentionally laid the foundations in the years before 1998. One can speak in this respect of a dogma, which remarkably enough has never been underpinned by convincing arguments of national governments and their bureaucracies. Such arguments can easily be made for primary and secondary education, but can they also for higher education? Global competitiveness and conditional national control do not go together very well. It seems that nobody involved in the process dared to bring up the principle of 'subsidiarity' in this context. It would have made sense. It was not by accident that the heads of state linked the Lisbon objectives to research and higher education and higher VET policies. It would have helped to align higher education policies at European level in the interest of the countries involved, which should have gone beyond the notion of 'voluntarism'. But, at least for the ministers of education and their civil servants, it was a bridge too far.

Had this direction been chosen, it would have allowed for the application of the European Union governing mechanisms and principles. Why was it possible to endorse EU recommendations for the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and for Key Competences, and not for a common educational system based on cycles, not for an agreed quality assurance system and/or not for one common European credit system for transfer and accumulation? More consistency applied in the process would probably have guaranteed better results. However, instead the choice was made to involve another 22 countries, accepting the European Cultural Convention as the condition for membership, which slowed the process down considerably. Even that circle was broken by accepting Belarus as a member in 2015. It resulted in an uneven group of countries with

quite different levels of experience and educational practices and philosophies. In this case the saying, 'the more the merrier' did not apply.

It was not only standing political opinions – education being perceived as a national responsibility – but also personal opinions that blocked closer cooperation with the European Commission in the framework of the European Union institutions. Both Claude Allègre and Tessa Blackstone did not hide their disdain for the European Commission, although they did not articulate their reasons very well.

The size and the voluntary character of the process had implications not only for the governance model but also for the conceptual backbone. There was no clarity about the underpinning concept when the Bologna Process started. The key notion became 'convergence' to label the Process, not 'harmonization' as would have been most logic. Minister Claude Allègre was right in stipulating that the process was all about harmonization. For very good reasons the term was included in the title of the 'Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education System'. How else to introduce a two cycle system? Instead, the term 'policy convergence' was introduced and applied as an isolated notion and axiom and not as a concept, because those directly involved seemed not to have much understanding of its conceptual implications, as well as of its related concepts. 'Harmonization' would have been much more appropriate given the aims and objectives of the Process, because its definition reflects 'a process of adjustment of differences and inconsistencies to bring significant features into agreement'. Taking the system level as the level of policy making, meant setting common features and rules for a two, and later a three cycle system, for quality assurance and for recognition mechanisms. It is no surprise that over time stakeholders had far less difficulties using the term 'harmonisation' because it is not equal to 'unification', a concept that Allègre very unfairly linked to European Commission policy making in the field of education. His remark seems to be a reflection of the mood of time.

Countries and their civil servants did not dare to or were unwilling to jump over their own shadows. This became clear when the architecture of the two-cycle system was discussed and agreement had to be reached about the length of the bachelor and the master programmes in academic years and in ECTS credits. The compromise reached for the bachelor (3 to 4 years), given the different structures of secondary education, made sense and met the features of the concept of 'harmonisation'. The decision on the master did not. It was steered by national budgetary arguments, not educational ones, with a 'multi-headed monster' as its outcome. The resulting wide variation, reflects lack of harmonisation and therefore policymaking. This is no wonder because the governing model, in addition to the approach of policy convergence, proved too weak to reach the required results. However, this was not immediately clear.

The overarching Dublin (level) descriptors defined by the Joint Quality Initiative and the Qualifications Framework of the EHEA into which these were incorporated, as well as the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, can and should be perceived as major successes of the Bologna Process. However, as in the case of the transformation of ECTS into a transfer and accumulation system around the same time, mainly experts from the world of academia and quality assurance were responsible for the products. The European Commission played an important role behind the scenes. Initial irritation had given way to pragmatism. But, as we have seen, the signatory countries were not willing to give the Commission much visibility in the Process despite its strong record in promoting internationalisation as a result of the successes of the ERASMUS Programme. As has been outlined, except the proposal to introduce a two cycle structure to align the organisation of higher education programmes in Europe with the world standard, all objectives of the Bologna Declaration were already covered by the SOCRATES programme, the successor of the ERASMUS Programme in 1994.

The Bologna Process is difficult to imagine without the experience of the ERASMUS/SOCRATES Programme and in particular the European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in the approximately ten years preceding the signing of the Sorbonne Declaration. Although establishing ERASMUS was not without hick-ups, anno 2018 the Programme and its successors, of which the most recent version is ERASMUS +, are widely regarded as one of the most successful flagship programmes of the European Union. ERASMUS was set up as an instrument to develop and implement the European dimension of higher education, and resulted in the main tool for modernisation and innovation in Europe, through cooperation of higher education institutions. The fact that, already in the final years of the last century it could claim strong support from the European institutions – the Council of Ministers, European Commission and the European Parliament – as well as from the individual member states, explains why the way both Declarations were prepared and the follow-up Process was given substance and direction took the Commission officials by surprise.

The establishment and development of ECTS played an important role in this respect. The ECTS Pilot Scheme (1989-1995) can be perceived as the incubator of the leading models of both internationalisation and credit systems in the world today. It is an excellent example of close cooperation between the EU policy level and the academic world, which was represented at the level of both the higher education institutions and the individual academics. Set up as a project applying the features of ‘educational action research’, it developed a sustainable and robust system for the recognition of learning based on the notion of student workload. This approach was completely new at the time. It developed a full set

of tools fundamental for student mobility that are still used today. Already in 1993, it had reached a level of adulthood to start disseminating it as the leading European model, which indeed happened from 1995 on. The EU invested great sums in the development and the extension of the system over time. To protect the brand ECTS and to support dissemination, an international group of counsellors and a system of national helplines was set up, which at the end of the 1990s could be perceived as the most prominent group of experts in Europe in the field of the internationalisation of higher education. Many of its members would play a prominent role in supporting the Bologna Process from 2001 onward. As has been outlined, the history of ECTS and the Bologna Process are intertwined. This became formal when in 2004 the ECTS Counsellors were renamed Bologna Promoters.

Indeed without the ERASMUS and ECTS experience there would have been no Bologna Process and without ECTS and Bologna no Tuning initiative. Although, the Bologna Declaration gave a push to the status of ECTS, the system did not really penetrate mainstream policy making of the higher education institutions. Recognition of studies was less successful than might have been expected or hoped for. Without tailored action the expectations for ECTS were perceived as low, according to the international group of counsellors. The solution was sought in the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project set up around the turn of the century. It did define the challenge, but did not come up with an action plan. It made clear however that the future of ECTS was in turning it into an overarching transfer and accumulation system. This challenge was picked up by a new initiative, the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project, launched in the autumn of 2000. It was an initiative of a group of ECTS counsellors and strongly supported by the EC.

This brings us to the actual implementation of the aims of the Bologna Process. The objective of the Tuning project was to give a voice to the higher education world. In conjunction, it also wanted to find a solution for the lack of recognition of studies taken abroad. As has been explained the Tuning agenda was ambitious. Because it was designed as a bottom-up initiative its initiators understood far better than the ministerial representatives in the Bologna Follow-up Group, that the Bologna Process was a multi-layered process. To be successful, it required full alignment of all levels involved in the process to make it successful. For this purpose, Tuning developed a multi-level and multi-actor approach, which was applied from the very start, but was only visualised recently. Tuning distinguished in practice five policy-making levels, ranging from the European one to the level of the department and its staff and students. In its model, it differentiated between the system dimension and the structure and content dimensions. That is why it chose its name. At the system level – European institutions and national governments – it expected ‘harmonisation’, at the structural and content

level it aimed for convergence or ‘tuning’. ‘Tuning’ to stress the need for diversity in degree programme design and implementation and autonomy in terms of responsibilities. This was consistent with its multi-actors model in which a distinction was made between policy-making and policy implementation with the management of higher education institutions as its pivotal point.

The Tuning governing model presumes continuous interaction between levels, like an elevator going up-and-down, based on mutual respect of responsibilities. During the period until the Leuven-Louvain Ministerial conference of 2009 there was indeed mutual and reciprocal engagement, with members of the Bologna Follow-Up Group taking part in Tuning meetings and Tuning coordinators being fully involved and engaged in Bologna Seminars. Also strong connections were in operation between the EUA and national Rectors’ Conferences and Tuning. Tuning was the one link between the grass-root level and the international level. However, from 2009 onward mainly lip service would be paid by the Bologna Follow-Up Group to the relevance of the higher education institutions and their staff and students. Already since 2005 it had no longer involved academic experts in its working groups. This was remarkable because at that time, the establishment of national qualifications frameworks was in full swing and the actual step to implementation had to be made. An action programme to engage higher education institutions with its leadership in a central role was not developed. Modernisation does not come automatically when it involves a paradigm change. Was there no outreach at European level, the situation in the vast majority of countries was not much better. The gradual discontinuity of half of the national teams of Bologna promoters – for which the governments concerned should be held responsible – is symbolic in this respect.

Tuning saw it as its mission to fill the gap between policy-making – that is system accommodation – and actual implementation of the policies adopted at the level of educational structures and organisation of studies. It developed an approach that offered a robust model for reforming individual study programmes on the basis of the student-centred approach, which it introduced at the very start of the project. Student-centred learning required a paradigm change, implying the application of the competence and learning outcomes based approach. It raised awareness about transferable skills/ generic competences as integral part of the learning process. It developed in a total of four phases, covering the period 2001-2009, a toolbox for the design, delivery and enhancement of degree programmes, as well as a methodology to measure student workload in the context of ECTS. It was instrumental in re-modelling ECTS from a transfer system into and transfer *and accumulation* system as one of its contractual obligations. Tuning also developed the concept of subject area level descriptors and reference points which resulted in nine brochures offering a benchmark for as many subject areas. They were followed-up by many others,

which involved Thematic Network Programmes that were also subsidized by the European Union.

The Tuning benchmarks were developed in the same period as the Quality Assurance Agency benchmark papers in the UK (which proved to be very useful for reasons of comparison and alignment) and as the Joint Quality Initiative Dublin descriptors. Although the Tuning Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes documents were of value and highly inspirational to many, they had one serious weakness. They were not sufficiently aligned with the two European overarching frameworks, the QF for the EHEA and the EQF for Lifelong Learning. This omission would slowly be overcome in the years after 2009 when Tuning developed sectoral qualifications frameworks. In particular the one for the Humanities and the Arts (2012) was of relevance. It proved to be one of the stepping stones for the youngest Tuning initiative, the *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education* (CALO-HEE) project.

What played a role in this was the discussion about concepts and terminology. From 2000, Tuning introduced Europe-wide concepts of competences and learning outcomes. Special for the Tuning approach is connecting those two. The project thought it important to apply language that would be understood by all stakeholders, including in particular employers and professional organisations. Tuning made clear that competences were developed gradually by students over a period of time and measured in stages by applying learning outcomes statements. It developed definitions for competences and, in conjunction with UK experts, for learning outcomes that are still widely applied. Regarding competences it made the distinction between generic or general competences and subject specific competences, covering both knowledge and skills. Generic competences were divided into instrumental, interpersonal and systemic ones. Consultations of key stakeholder groups showed their importance as part of the learning process. Although initially there was reservation among academics about the relevance of generic competences as part of an academic programme, Tuning was able to make the point that they were important for preparing for the labour market/ fostering employability. Besides developing deep knowledge about an academic field, personal development and preparing for citizenship, preparation for the labour market was seen by the Tuning experts as an important feature of every degree programme. The outcomes of its consultations showed the generic competence gap which had to be understood against the background of high unemployment which developed in the 1990s. Anno 2018 the importance of these competences is no longer challenged, but at the time they were.

In 2010 after the Leuven the Ministerial Conference held in Leuven – Louvain-la-Neuve, the publication of the Bologna Process Independent Assessment



and as a result of the cooperation with the Lumina Foundation in the application of the Tuning approach in the USA, the notion among the members of the Tuning experts team developed that there was a need for ‘evidence’. It was decided to set up a study to find out in both the EU and the USA whether the intended modernisation of learning was actually taking place and how this process was perceived by its main stakeholders. A two-pillar approach of quantitative and qualitative instruments was applied consisting of consultations and in-depth interviews implemented by a research team at a selected group of higher education institutions, involving management, teaching staff, student counsellors and students.

Although limited in scope, the outcome of the study published in the first months of 2016 were perceived as important. They showed that the discourse about the learning outcomes /student-centred approach was taking place, in particular among higher education management at different levels as well as educational policy officers, but that actual implementation was limited. It also noted confusion about the concepts and terminology in use. It became very obvious that lack of staff training and development was the main reason for limiting the reform of degree programmes. The research confirmed the outcomes of the report of the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, installed by the European Commission as well as the 2015 editions of the ESU *Bologna with student eyes*, the EUA *Trends VII* report and the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. In comparison to these three studies, the Tuning one offered much more detail why the student-centred approach was not really penetrating higher education programmes. The research also showed the disconnect between political ambitions and reality at grass-root level as a result of insufficient alignment of policy-making and policy implementation by the actors involved, who did not respect the multi-layered and multi-level character of the Bologna Process very well.

This leads to the roles of the EUA, EURASHE, ESU and the European Commission in the Process. All three organisations have been central in terms of policy development, but far less with regard to the actual implementation of the policy objectives. Although the EUA, EURASHE and ESU claimed that they represented their members, being respectively national rectors’ conferences and higher education institutions and national student unions and organisations and students, in practice all three organisations did very little to bridge the five levels identified by Tuning in its multi-level governance model and its multi-actors model. They contributed rather well to the policy discussions – they formulated original ideas, published many studies and organised policy related events -, but did not reach out to faculties/ schools and departments/academic staff/ students. The actual implementation was left to the national level, which proved a guaran-

tee for limiting success in the vast majority of countries. The three organisations performed well in the communication with policy makers and rectors and vice-rectors and student leaders, but not in the communication with the lower levels within the higher education institutions. Given the decentralised decision structures of most higher education institutions, this meant that policy aims did not arrive at the level where they should make a difference. One can of course also blame national authorities and higher education management for this fact. The Tuning research showed that anno 2015 the Bologna Process had lost momentum and both staff and students proved not to be (very well) informed about its aims and objectives and the roles foreseen for them in the process.

At least until 2005 the European Commission had the mechanisms through its team of ECTS international counsellors and national helplines, the Tuning project (which was perceived by outsiders as part of the Bologna Process) and the Thematic Network Programmes, to line up with the higher education world at the three indicated (sub-)levels within an institution. The Bologna Follow-Up Group was not in that position, in particular when after 2005 it did no longer involve academic experts as part of their experts' groups. The European Commission and the Bologna Follow-Up Group made the huge strategic mistake to cut these direct links with the higher education sector. From 2009 the gap between the higher education world and the European level only widened. Universities, their academic staffs and students started to lose interest in the Bologna Process, if they ever had any. Ironically, 2009 was the year the concept of student-centred learning was explicitly introduced in the Leuven-Louvain Communiqué, after having been mentioned two years earlier in the London Communiqué. The break between the EUA and Tuning and the (international) group of Bologna Promoters, which occurred in 2007, did not help either.

Lack of progress particularly in implementation urged Tuning to take a new initiative in the *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education* (CALOHEE) project, co-financed again by the European Commission and the higher education institutions and organisations involved. According to plan, it should result in updated easy-to-use materials which allowed for making reforms easier at degree programme level. It should also result in better evidence regarding the performance of higher education institutions and the quality and relevance of their programmes. CALOHEE indeed delivered what it had promised: updated Guidelines and Reference Points documents, one-page subject area qualifications reference frameworks and related – more detailed – assessment reference frameworks involving measurable learning outcomes statements and a multi-dimensional instrument to measure learning. Innovative is the merger of the two overarching European qualifications frameworks and the use of the concept of 'dimensions' to structure learning as a basis for defining the subject area qualifications reference frameworks. A real plus is also the de-

velopment and application of ‘competency frameworks for the world of work’ and the ‘competency framework for civic, social and cultural engagement’ as integral components for constructing its reference frameworks, meant as benchmarks. Having these materials available now, it is hoped, that they will contribute significantly (again) to realising the intended reforms. Time will tell whether the CALOHEE products will indeed renew the interest for the reform of higher education programmes by focussing on the final product of the learning process, the well-educated student. Whatever the follow-up, the circle that started with policy aims as formulated in the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations has now been closed by CALOHEE by showing what students are actually expected to learn according to the sophisticated assessment reference frameworks it has produced.

Considering 30 years of ECTS and 20 years of Bologna Process, a lot has been established. A three-cycle system has been accepted as the leading model to organise higher education programmes in all Bologna signatory countries, although the actual implementation requires further improvement and alignment. Overarching qualifications frameworks have been endorsed of which the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area is a formal product of the Bologna Process. European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance have been agreed in 2005 and again ten years later in slightly revised and enhanced format. However, they still await implementation in many signatory countries. The fact that 48 countries have been discussing ‘harmonisation’ and ‘convergence’ of higher education systems and structures for 20 years, is a positive outcome in itself.

What should also be acknowledged and valued is the tremendous interest the Process has generated over time. In the first years among the informed general public, at a later stage in particular among scholars. This has resulted in a library stocked with publications, which cover all kinds of aspects of the Bologna Process and the development of the European Higher Education Area. Initially, the judgement in the scholarly literature about the Process was rather positive, but since 2010 it has become much more critical because of the disappointing lack of progress, both at system and at implementation level. This lack has been documented well, in particular by the Bologna Process Implementation Reports of 2012, 2015 and 2018 as well as the reports of the EUA, ESU and the Tuning Study.

As has been outlined, there are clear reasons for the situation we are in now, that is a wide variety in level of implementation between countries, higher education institutions and degree programmes. The intergovernmental approach applied, based on the ‘Open Method of Coordinating’, did not prove to be a model guaranteeing success. The execution of the Bologna Process confirmed that international cooperation simply does not work sufficiently well if there are

no clear incentives, obvious self-interests and/or agreed mechanisms for enforcing it. The countries that signed up to the Bologna agenda proved to be unable to march together after 2005, when the infrastructure for making the actual reforms was adopted. It gives the impression of a maximum stretched platoon of cyclists, with some lagging very far behind and about to give up, without informing the others. Given the state of affairs, it is obvious that many countries, in particular those who joined the Process at a later stage, never intended to seriously convert their policies fully to the agreed European model. And, if they originally had this intention, they discovered over the years they were not able to do so for a variety of reasons. In other words, the image created that the Bologna Process has been one of the most successful examples of international (voluntary) cooperation has proven – so far – to be a mirage.

The progress reports show that the Bologna Process has more or less come to a standstill around 2010. A number of countries have not created sufficiently well the conditions to make agreed policies a reality; they also have not facilitated the higher education institutions in their countries to reform their degree programmes according to the student-centred approach, which is founded on learning outcomes and associated ECTS credits. As has been identified in this book, one main obstacle is the fact that teaching staff has not been trained/prepared to apply these new approaches. They have been educated as content experts, not as facilitators or coaches of the learning process. At present, most teachers are airplane pilots with only the experience of a passenger, since they are not trained to be a teacher (and in that context not knowledgeable about the student-centred approach), and therefore miss both pedagogical theoretical education and ownership of the necessary tools to implement the paradigm shift. This toolbox has been created and made available but is clearly not sufficiently well used at present. As has been outlined in this book, in a student-centred/outcome-based model teachers have a shared responsibility for the delivered quality in the education process, which requires teamwork, coordination and cooperation. This means a different role for the teacher and a more active role for the student. In many institutions this paradigm change still has to be made. It can be perceived as a positive signal that the importance of staff training and development has now been fully acknowledged in the latest Communiqué of the ministers of education, that of Paris 2018. It is also positive that in that Communiqué the central role of the higher education community and institutions is stipulated once more.

However, stipulation no longer seems to be enough, because – to put it bluntly – a decade has been wasted in transnational policy making without much result. The only reasonable way forward is to endorse that change is not realized by inward looking civil servants of national governments, meeting each other regularly on an international platform in a voluntary setting. Talking has to be

replaced by actual doing. It conditions replacing the present governance model of the Open Method of Coordination by a real multi-governance and multi-actor framework and consequently, accepting the higher education sector and its institutions as full partners. It also implies real harmonisation at system level for all three key Bologna objectives: the three educational cycles, a quality assurance model and a European credit transfer and accumulation system that is based on compatible and comparable (national) rules and regulations. This is a requirement for mutual recognition of diplomas and certificates and periods of study. If such a European Higher Education Area cannot be realized by the 48 countries involved in the Bologna Process, the membership of the European Union should ask itself whether self-interest – that is supporting the single market with an appropriate EU higher education system (the initial goal) – is not the next step to make. It requires that national governments accept that the EU subsidiarity principles are also applicable to EU higher education (institutions), operating in a global competitive environment – which is made visible in ranking lists for instances. Persisting that higher education is a national responsibility is not in the interest of the higher education sector, nor in that of the national economies with the Lisbon Strategy in mind (which was defined in 2000).

Having said this, it is also fair to memorate that as a result of the Bologna Process and the Tuning initiative systems and structures are in place, or models at least are available, although there is an obvious need for further harmonisation at system level and tuning/ convergence at the level of structures and content, while fully respecting autonomy and diversity. As has been outlined, the five governing levels identified by Tuning have not been able and allowed to develop – in interaction – into a full-fledged European Higher Education Area based on current, high quality competitive and comparable programmes which are founded in a well-established quality culture. Some countries have done clearly better than others, which has led to frustration. One may argue that the glass is half full or half empty, but it is clear that the work has not been finished and there is still a long way to go, although the full set of instruments, including the latest edition of the ECTS Users' Guide and the state-of-the-art materials developed recently by the CALOHEE project, are available to facilitate the necessary changes. Therefore, the motto of this study has not lost any of its relevance anno 2018, that is – in the interest of the higher education community and society at large: REFORM!



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## REFORM!

# TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe. A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning

In 2019 the Bologna Process celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the European credit system ECTS its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. These are related, as is the grass-root project *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, which was a response to these initiatives.

This book tells the story of 30 years of modernisation of higher education in Europe, on the basis of an analysis of the intertwined history of these three initiatives. The perspective taken is that of the higher education world of academics and the degree programmes on offer. It is an intriguing history of successes, failure and challenges, in which the different levels of policy-making and implementation are related. It also highlights the role of the many actors involved.

The study is a must read for all that work for or in higher education and have an interest and are involved in the reform process of the sector and its deliveries.

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Robert Wagenaar is Director of the University of Groningen branch of the *International Tuning Academy*, which is an education and research centre with focus on the reform of higher education programmes. It runs a bi-annual *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. The Academy originates from the global Tuning Educational Structures initiatives launched in 2000 of which Wagenaar is co-founder. From 2003 until mid-2014 he was director of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies at the Faculty of Arts in Groningen. He has been involved in the development of many international initiatives such as the development of ECTS since 1989 and the two overarching European qualifications frameworks. His research interest is in higher education innovation and policy-making.



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