

Office of Education

Principality of Liechtenstein

LIECHTENSTEIN

State of Implementation of the Bologna Objectives

1. Introduction

The Bologna process is probably the most important reform movement to have emerged in the field of higher education in the last few decades. The objective is to improve the mobility of students and staff, and to establish a single European Higher Education Area by 2010. Among other things, the process focuses on such aspects as the mutual recognition of qualifications obtained and credits for courses attended, and in general it is designed to promote comparable course structures. In this context, transparency and mutual trust are a *sine qua non*.

As a small country at the heart of Europe, Liechtenstein has welcomed and supported the Bologna process from the start. The objectives are highly advantageous for a country like ours, whose young people have always tended to study abroad, mainly in Switzerland and Austria. Although Liechtenstein has had a higher education sector of its own since 1992, it is small like the country itself, comprising just three officially recognized institutions: the Liechtenstein University of Applied Sciences, the International Academy of Philosophy, and the University of Human Sciences (two-year post-graduate course). Students from abroad study at all three universities and in some cases form the majority.

The following is a summary report on the progress made in Liechtenstein to date with the implementation of the Bologna objectives. It shows that Liechtenstein has already completed various aspects of the Bologna process in the field of higher education.

2. Implementation of the individual goals

2.1 A system of clear and comparable qualifications

The Diploma Supplement has now been introduced at both the Liechtenstein University of Applied Sciences and the International Academy of Philosophy. The supplement is available in English and German free of charge and is in full compliance with the European regulations.

The University of Human Sciences is still a relatively new institution in the field of post-graduate university studies, the first three students having completed their doctoral degree courses this spring. In the course of 2003 the university will also be introducing a Diploma Supplement in line with the above criteria.

2.2 The Bachelor's/Master's system

The Bachelor's/Master's system is already in place in Liechtenstein at the University of Applied Sciences and the International Academy of Philosophy. At the latter, the Bachelor's and Master's degree courses both require two full years of study; at the former, the Bachelor's course takes at least three years, and the Master's course at least three semesters. The Bachelor's degree course at the International Academy of Philosophy is due to become a three-year course soon.

2.3 The introduction of a credits system

At both the Liechtenstein University of Applied Sciences and the International Academy of Philosophy, students receive credits for all completed course modules in accordance with the provisions of the European Transfer Credit System (ECTS) developed by the European Union. The curricula and course descriptions list the ECTS credits awarded for the various modules.

The credits system has not been introduced at the University of Human Sciences, which offers only post-graduate courses, as mentioned above.

2.4 Improving mobility

2.4.1 Students

Student mobility is taken very seriously in Liechtenstein, and involvement in the Erasmus exchange programme operated by the European Union is considered to be of particularly great importance.

The Liechtenstein University of Applied Sciences believes that students should spend a semester abroad, and has set a short-term target of at least ten percent of all students doing so. That compares with what is already a respectable figure of seven percent today. For an institution of its size, the partnership programme operated by the University of Applied Sciences is impressive, comprising some thirty universities worldwide. The objective of the programme is to promote student and staff exchanges and run joint projects.

Credits obtained by students abroad are accepted in Liechtenstein as long as a written agreement is drawn up between the student and the university abroad prior to the period of study, listing the classes to be attended and examinations to be taken, and evidence of fulfilment of the agreement is presented by the student on his or her return to Liechtenstein. Students from abroad are very welcome in Liechtenstein and are offered the same services.

In addition to the basic system of government funding in the form of grants or loans, students in Liechtenstein also receive generous support in the framework of the Erasmus programme. All Liechtenstein students in higher education abroad – and the majority of young people resident in Liechtenstein study in Switzerland or Austria – also receive government support to enable them to spend a semester in another country just like Erasmus students.

2.4.2 Teaching staff

Greater staff mobility is also one of the objectives of the Erasmus exchange programme. Lecturers at the University of Applied Sciences make regular use of the university's exchange network, and the university similarly hosts staff from other countries. The University of Human Sciences also invites visiting professors from all over the world as a source of enrichment in terms of the teaching offered and flexibility with regard to the availability of courses targeted at students' interests and needs in line with the principle of Teaching on Demand.

2.5 Quality Assurance

Liechtenstein is affiliated to the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and is committed to the quality standards targeted by that organisation.

Opening an institution of higher education in Liechtenstein first of all requires government approval. Once the prescribed quality standards have been met and certain criteria fulfilled, the institution can then apply for formal recognition by the authority. To assess whether the requirements have been satisfied and to ensure high standards of quality in the long term, a system of regular peer reviews has now been introduced in Liechtenstein. The peer groups are comprised of experts, primarily from Switzerland and Austria, and their mandate is to make a significant contribution to quality assurance and quality development. The system also provides for services to be hired from leading quality assurance agencies abroad. At the present time, the Liechtenstein University of Applied Sciences is planning to hold the accreditation procedures for the Faculties of Architecture and Business Science in autumn of this year.

The regular involvement of students in the evaluation of the curriculum and the quality of the teaching is an integral part of the quality assurance system in Liechtenstein.

2.6 The European dimension in higher education

International networking is of eminent importance today and is basic to the philosophy of all three institutions of higher education in Liechtenstein. They have accordingly established partnership and exchange programmes with universities and research institutes in Europe and overseas.

2.7 The social dimension

Financial assistance for students in Liechtenstein is regulated by law and takes the form of grants or loans, with students' capacity for self-financing assessed on the basis of their income and/or that of their parents. Students spending a semester abroad receive additional support as mentioned above, which in this case is not means-tested.

A proposed amendment to the law on student funding has now been circulated for comment in Liechtenstein prior to presentation to Parliament. The goal of the new legislation is to achieve a general improvement in the support available in the field of full time and continuous education, and to put vocational training on an equal footing with university education. On the other hand, the additional funding envisaged is to take the form of student loans more frequently than in the past.

2.8 Life-long learning

Liechtenstein has a very full offering in the field of adult education. In addition to the private sector, many of the courses are provided by various foundations, associations and other public institutions with government support.

Liechtenstein's higher education institutions also attach particular importance to programmes targeted at life-long learning, and they regularly organise public talks, lectures and seminars. The University of Applied Sciences in particular has a continuous education offering in the form of series of lectures, post-diploma courses and non-degree courses.

3. Final remarks

Implementation of the Bologna objectives is already well advanced in Liechtenstein and is to be further developed as a continuous process. In order to provide a legal basis for the above developments, the 1992 law relating to universities of applied sciences, and university and research institutes is to be revised. A draft for a new framework law has already been sent out for comment and it is due to receive a first reading in Parliament in autumn of this year so that the legislation can be enacted by spring 2004 at the latest. The draft includes provisions for the Bachelor's/Master's system and the university credits system. The new law will also clarify the situation with regard to approvals and formal recognition for institutions of higher education and will address the subject of quality assurance and development. With the framework law in place, it will then be possible to introduce specific legislation, e.g. for the Liechtenstein University of Applied Sciences itself.

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