Dutch EU Presidency Conference /
Bologna-Berlin-Bergen Seminar

"Designing policies for mobile students"

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science /
The Netherlands

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Report by the Rapporteur

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(1) General data. The conference on '*Designing policies for mobile students*' was organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands and took place in Noordwijk, 11-12 October 2004, as a part of activities under the Dutch EU Presidency. It was the sixth event in a line of fourteen 2004-2005 Bologna Follow-up Seminars and focused mainly along *the Bologna action line 4: Promotion of Mobility*. Participants discussed key issues in higher education which are relevant in order to help removing obstacles to student and staff mobility and encouraging academic mobility in general. The conference identified a set of relevant issues: *legislation and student support, practice and issues of student support in various countries, portability of grants and loans, creating transparency in European higher education, quality assurance and internationalisation.*

The conference was organized in two morning plenary sessions and in five afternoon workshops ('stations'). The conference Chairman was Theo Toonen, Professor in Public Administration at Leiden University. Opening speech with an overview of themes and developments on this issue was given at the opening of the seminar by Mr. Mark Rutte, State Secretary from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. European Commission perspective on mobility issues was presented by Ms. Marta Fereira and student perspective by Mr. Andrzej Bielecki from ESIB.

Two keynotes were also given during the plenary session of the first day while in the afternoon some more specific contributions were presented in the conference 'stations' in a way which enabled participants to visit most of them and to discuss various issues more in depth. Short summary reports were also made from all workshops. Presentations, keynotes and other contributions at the conference have been collected and are available – together with photographs - from the conference web site.[1] In addition, a remarkable publication was presented on *Portability of student financial support* (An inventory in 23 European countries) based on a recent CHEPS survey.[2] Altogether, there were more than 150 participants from 30 'Bologna' countries as well representatives from European Commission, Council of Europe, Unesco-Cepes, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB at the conference. Thus, this conference belongs to those Bologna-Berlin-Bergen follow-up seminars with the highest attendance rate.

(2) Mobility as the central issue of the Bologna Process. The interest shown can't be a surprise: in concrete terms, most obvious to students and their parents, academic staff and broad public, *the mobility issues are the most concrete point of departure in changing European higher education.* Mobility is a kind of axis which gives special dynamics to all Bologna action lines: compatibility and transparency of national higher education systems, their mutual concern for quality assessment, broad use of ECTS and Diploma Supplement, mutual recognition of study periods and qualifications, development of 'European dimension' as well as attractiveness outside Europe, etc.

[1, 2] See Bibliography at the end of the Report.

(3) Mobility issues at a present stage of the Bologna Process. It seems that at the present stage of the Process we need more synthetic approaches: focusing to a single Bologna action line does not seem particularly productive. BFUG also stated that we should not continue with proposing and adding new action lines on the agenda but to link them, to test their coherence and to focus to their inner interdependence in order to foster the Process towards reaching concrete goals – *the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) until 2010.* From this perspective, mobility is also a connecting point between two main clusters of issues from the agenda - *structural* and *social dimension* of the Bologna Process.

However, it should not be understood that there is no more time for detailed analysis on particular issues. On the contrary, we need them even more to clarify all those important details which can only arise when various aspects and dimensions are put together. The conference on '*Designing policies for mobile students*' made an important contribution towards this direction while addressing various aspects of student support and portability: practice and issues, legislative contexts, transparency, quality assurance, joint degrees, internationalisation etc.

For the success of the present follow-up period until Bergen it is very important that the inputs from this and all other seminars could be analysed in light of interdependency and contextuality of particular issues.

(4) Portability of student financial support in European countries. Analytical results from the CHEPS survey on portability of student support in 23 European countries (Vossensteyn, 2004), commissioned by the Bologna working group on the international aspects of loans and grants, provided participants with rather shadow side of our higher education landscapes. In fact, this survey is the first detailed presentation of student support systems in a broader group of European countries. A particularly important message from the report can be interpreted as a warning that the *problem of incompatibility* of various national systems *does not refer only to structural dimension* (e.g. compatible degree structures; common European framework of qualifications, etc.) *but also to social dimension* (e.g. compatible student support schemes, portability of grants and loans, etc.) of the Bologna Process.

The conference with participants coming from so many countries was a unique opportunity to discuss main messages of the survey. Participants were far from believing that the answer is only one and simple. Existing provisions on student support and portability reflect variety of national and regional contexts. Unfortunately, in this case, the 'diversity' is far from being 'our common richness'; it rather makes part of our common troubles and obstacles to an increased mobility. Discussions showed that existing national provisions and practices – sometimes not only different but opposing and contradicting – are rooted in special conditions and particular traditions which should be understood and taken into account when searching for better answers:
a) political developments in various countries with the particular consensuses reached so far, with their solutions and decisions about these issues;
b) economic positions (past, present, future) of different countries;

c) national legislation challenged by the EU legislation;
d) cultural background (value orientations; family contexts; etc.).

(5) Discussions in workshops. At this point, discussion at the conference clearly showed another key topic which should be addressed in further run of the Process in a similar way as in the case of searching for common framework of qualifications. Even more; it already gave some inputs towards this direction. Discussions in workshops provided important accents, drawn to some examples to be considered or put tasks to be addressed in near future. Some of these accents are given in the continuation.

(6) Workshop 1: EU-legislation and student support. Two workshop presentations with respect to the European case-law on student support provided participants with *an excellent overview on EU-legislation and student support* (see Schrauwen, Watson). Both presentations are in particularly important when the relationship between national legislation and EU legislation is discussed; thus, they also provide *a reference for further discussions on this issue*.

(a.) In the *EU Treaty,* education-policy is almost entirely left to the discretion of the member states. However, even in this field the influence of EU legislation is felt, by reason of the rights of freedom of movement and the prohibition of discrimination. Due to these provisions, member states are obliged to grant students from other EU-countries the same support for the access to vocational training (this also includes higher education) as they grant their national students (tuition support). Further more, student support for maintenance has been identified as a social advantage which has to be granted to persons and their children from EU-countries on the same footing as nationals when these persons are using (or have used) their right on free movement to work (either as an employee or self-employed).

(b.) The EU-citizenship, as introduced by the *Treaty of Maastricht*, has raised new questions with regards to the entitlement to maintenance support by students, studying in an other EU-member state then their own, who are not (children of) persons using their rights to free movement. So far, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has held that:
- EU citizenship is destined to be the fundamental status of all nationals of the member states;
- the *EU Treaty* attributes certain rights to EU citizens which are subject to limitations and conditions in the Directives;
- these rights can be invoked directly before the national courts;
- these limitations and conditions must be applied in accordance to the principle of proportionality.
New rulings of the ECJ may give answers to some of the questions that have been raised. An important pending case is the Bidar case (C-209/03). The conclusion of the advocate general is expected by November 11th 2004.

(c.) As the issue of EU legislation is extremely important for the future developments in the field of portability of students support, a remark from the audience should not be missed that the portability of student support should

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be considered also as *an open issue in a much broader group of (today) 40 countries of the Bologna Process.*

(7) Workshop 2: Student support and portability for study abroad.
Discussion was organized around Hans Vossensteyn's presentation of a study regarding student finance policy and portability of student support in 23 European countries. The discussion mostly focussed on the following themes: home versus host based support, long term and short term solutions and possibilities for a pan-European solution.

(a.) Some arguments were presented in favour of *student support provided by the host country.* There are many differences between countries in living costs. Support in the host country is in harmony with local purchasing power while support from the home country usually is not in harmony with the actual costs abroad.

(b.) More arguments were presented in favour of *student support provided by the home country.* Student mobility should be seen in a wider context; mobility outside the EU is also valuable. It's better for mobility if student support is home-based. If a support is host-based countries with more 'generous' support will attract more students. This would put an extra strain on budgets and would eventually lead to a less 'generous' system and consequently to less mobility. There is already some variation in tuition fees in the EU; if student support is host-based and a country has a high tuition fee and a relatively low fee support than it would not be attractive to study in this country.

If a support system is host-based a mobile student will have to inform him/herself about every system in order to make his/her 'best' choice. If the student can only take support from his own country to another country, the system is much more transparent and less bureaucratic. Also, the system itself will have less administrative burden and will therefore cost less.

(c.) There were also some arguments presented in favour of a *pan-European solution.* Neither home- nor host-based support is sufficient: we need a combination and probably a European fund which would be able to facilitate both the home and hosting advantages. If there are legal obstacles they can be removed. Participants stressed that there is no mobility without a support. We should not get discrepancies within Europe where the 'West' gets further ahead and the 'East' falls further behind. Further on, mobility should not be developed as a brain drain from the East to the West.

A possible answer could probably be to establish a European fund that would be based on the home principle, but evens the differences between countries by adding extra money to the support from home if the support isn't sufficient for the country where the student is going to study. One concern regarding this *European student support fund* is that it would stimulate countries to lower their student support and depend on the European level to cover the cost. Participants mostly agreed that the long term perspective should be a European support system, which combines benefits from both home and host based systems. In the short term a European system isn't feasible. However

there should be a consensus among countries on what the criteria are for eligibility.

(8) Workshop 3: Portability of student financial support. This workshop continued in a similar horizon, giving two national case studies: one from Sweden (see Gullfeldt and Norman Torvang) and one from The Netherlands (see Seerden); both case studies stimulated a creative debate.

(a.) *The Swedish Government* finds important for students to be mobile; this has been its policy for over 30 years. Students in Sweden are eligible for a grant and a repayable loan. Since the end of the eighties there has been a steady increase in the number of students who study abroad. The current policy of portability was designed for Swedish students at a time when it wasn't known that student support would be regarded as a social benefit and that EU employees and their families would be treated in this regard equally. Experience with portability so far is satisfactory, but it's getting more difficult as the EU legislation allows more citizens to get support from other countries. However, there is not enough reason to limit support at this time.

(b.) *The Dutch Government* also enhances student mobility. About one third of graduates already have international experience and the number of students who will want to complete (a part of) their education abroad will very probably continue to increase. The government policy aims at facilitating mobility by providing portable student support; government feels responsible for its own students and other people with a firm connection with the Netherlands. Therefore, portability is based on the home country principle but there are also some dilemmas regarding portability with regards to the view of the ECJ, which increasingly adopts elements of the host country principle. At the moment both the host and home country principle are used at the same time. This leads also to problems of double claims.

(c.) Several important findings and proposals were developed in 'station 3':
- There is a difference between *long term and short term solutions*. For short term, countries should apply good practices from other countries (for instance: Nordic countries). For long term there should be a common European solution (a suggestion was made in favour of a European fund supporting mobile students).
- However, *a European fund supporting mobile students* raised several dilemmas: on one hand, in an ideal scenario some countries would have to be more 'generous' for the benefit of all; on the other hand, 'generous' countries also have higher taxes - should they be 'generous' towards citizen from countries with lower taxes?
- It's urgent to start the *discussion about the long term solution*. There is no efficient short term solution without knowing how to proceed on the long term. We have to agree upon the decisive principle on the long term. The Bologna Process would stagnate if there was no long term perspective on this issue.
- ECJ lays down some decisions. Countries respond independently one from another. It would be more consistent that there should be *a common response from EU-members* on how to deal with certain rulings; there should be also an overview on how to proceed in certain cases.

- Different countries have different rules regarding eligibility for student support for EU-members. *Wouldn't it be better for everybody if we harmonized our criteria*? If so, who decides what the criteria are?
- Moreover, the lack of common definitions is also a problem. For instance: who is *a resident*? Finland has already changed its legislation to correct the definition, so less people are eligible for support.
- Without a solution at the EU level there is a risk that national systems will be minimised.

(9) Workshop 4: Typology of higher education institutions. As already mentioned, the conference discussed mobility also from a perspective of 'structural' issues and its strengthening through elimination of 'structural' obstacles. In this context, a presentation on the *typology of higher education institutions* (see Bartelse) opened lively discussion. The very term of *typology* was defined as an attempt to group higher education institutions (HEI) into recognisable categories according to their similarities and differences. The existing diversity of HEI calls for providing a transparent 'map' for multiple purposes and target groups. These target groups consist of students, HEI themselves, private and public organisations, the labour market, etc.

(a.) Presentation itself and further discussions in the workshop call for attention in this field. It is very *important to be aware about possible problems* like simplifying information; they can harm in particular when issues like ranking, quality assessment and resource allocation are at stake. For classification of HEI it is important to use multiple dimensions and to be flexible.

(b.) Most of the participants in the discussion were in favour of a transparent picture of European HEIs and of some kind of grouping into recognisable categories (*classification*), although they were also very critical about some aspects. The question was raised if students really care about these dimensions (what is the added value?). Another issue was made while discussing *ranking* (warning that classification could easily turn into ranking). Participants also emphasized the quantity of target groups and dimensions and gave advice to narrow them down. Other questions were also raised like who would provide the information and how the *objective information* (other than the traditional quantitative data) would be proved. Also the importance was stressed of implementing and furthering existing instruments in relation to transparency

(c.) Participants considered that a major role in developing of such a typology should be played by *the higher educational sector itself*. They were informed that a pilot study has started, subsidized by the Socrates programme, in which criteria for such a typology are explored and a draft typology could be tried out. It was also suggested that the results should be probably reported to the Bologna-Bergen ministers' conference, but in any case to BFUG for further consideration.

(10) Workshop 5: Quality assurance and Joint degrees. The fifth "station" gave an extremely interesting presentation of a joint degree project

in relation to quality assurance (see van den Bergh, Franzoni, Schreuders). Not only that joint degrees are closely connected to mobility issues; at this point mobility is closely connected with other key aims of the Bologna Process.

(a.) The issue of quality assurance and joint degrees was presented in light of a case study of the *European Master in Law and Economics* (EMLE; coordinating institution Erasmus University of Rotterdam; six participating institutions are from Bologna, Hamburg, Gent, Manchester, Aix and Vienna). This programme has been running for 10 years and recently received the entitlement of an *Erasmus Mundus programme*. The EMLE Erasmus Mundus programme consists of 3 terms in 1 year (60 ECTS) carried out in two or three countries (of the six participating). Out of 400 applicants only 100 are selected for the programme; a share of 41% are non-EU students. The tuition fee is € 7000-8000. The workload is standardised and the success rate is more than 90%.

(b.) *Internal EMLE quality assurance* consists of several tools and actions: regulations of study (evaluation of exams, evaluation of thesis), Board meetings (twice per year: mid-February and early October), meetings of teachers (coordination of course contents, quality control of teaching materials, common readers and exams), participation of students (reports by students to the Board, questionnaires) and alumni association. Internal benchmarking of grading was done, lots of statistic data are gathered, etc. External examiners and joint examination boards are standard practice in EMLE.

(c.) *External quality assurance* for the entire programme, including parts in the various other countries was done by the Dutch/Flemish agency NVAO. After a review of an international panel the programme was accredited. However, it recently turned out that the German *Akkreditierungsrat* might not grant accreditation to the EMLE programme, because of shortcomings in the requirements for the thesis.

(d.) The case study showed *practical implications of different accreditation criteria in the cooperating countries and the need of a standardized accreditation*; the programme was accredited in the Netherlands but it would need to be adjusted to meet German accreditation standards. However, just complying with the German accreditation, it would mean that the programme would not fit in the Erasmus Mundus format any more. It was therefore suggested that a programme which is accredited in one European country should either be accepted as accredited in another country as well, or that the criteria on which accreditation is based in different countries are standardized or at least not contradicting.

This experience and conclusions should be given also to the so-called E4 group (Quadripartite Group: ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB) as well as to the BFUG to be considered further.

(11) A need for a follow-up. At this conference, mobility was proved again as a complex issue with an extreme relevance for the success of the Bologna Process. EU member countries and, more broadly, all other Bologna member

countries have developed various systems and models of student support and various possibilities for portability. The conference put light to this variety of provisions and, in particular, stressed the importance of the relationship between national and EU-legislation.

There is still a lack of detailed information on structures and developments in different countries as well as a lack of reflected and/or organized good practices. On the other hand there are also unclear definitions which hinder faster developments. Common work on drafting guidelines for future could have positive effects but it should not be a top down commandment. From that aspect, *a European working group in this field* would have a lot of potential: in many discussions it was stressed that a network of student support experts from the member states should be founded. They should address the issue of portability of student support in a broader economic, social and cultural perspective.

Student support is an important subject to be taken up also in the context of the European Union. More cooperation and coordination on a European level is necessary. The words of Ms. Ferreira saying in the first morning plenary that the Commission recognises challenges in this area and will install a working group to deal with legal, political and administrative issues relating to student support were therefore welcomed very much by the participants.

Bibliography

A. *Contributions at the seminar*
   (available from the website: www.caos.nl/ocw)

Mark Rutte (State Secretary of Education, the Netherlands), *Opening Speech.*

Andrzej Bielecki (ESIB), *Student mobility – obstacles and paths for enhancement.*

Karl Dittrich (Vice-Chairman accreditation organization NVAO i.o.), *Transparency, programmes and institutions.*

Achim Meyer auf der Heyde (Director Deutshe Studentenwerke), *Financing mobility, students and institutions.*

Annette Schrauwen (University of Amsterdam), Stewart Watson (European Court of Justice), *EU legislation and future financing of student support.*

Hans Vossensteyn (CHEPS, University of Twente), Student support & portability for study abroad. Practice and issues.

Eva Gullfeldt and Linda Norman Torvang (Swedish Ministry of Education and Science), *Portability of student financial support- the Swedish perspective.*

Rikie Seerden (Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture & Science), *Portability of student support.*

Jeroen Bartelse (Netherlands Association of Universities – VSNU / CHEPS), *A typology of higher education institutions?*

Roger J. van den Bergh (Erasmus University of Roterdam), Luigi A. Franzoni (University of Bologna), Wicher Schreuders (Erasmus University of Roterdam), *Quality assurance and joint degrees. The EMLE programme as an example.*

Theo Toonen (Conference Chairman, University of Leiden), *Main results and recommendations from the various workshops.*

EU/Bologna Conference 'designing policies for mobile students' (Noordwijk, 10-12 October 2004) – *General Conclusions*.

B. *Publication*

Hans Vossensteyn (2004), *Portability of student financial support. An inventory in 23 European countries main report*. Enschede: CHEPS, September 2004 (75 pp.).

C. Summaries

Summary - Station 1: EU-legislation and student support
Summary - Station 2: Student support and portability for study abroad
Summary - Station 3: Portability of student financial support
Summary - Station 4: Typology of higher education institutions
Summary – Station 5: Quality assurance and Joint degrees