

## FRANCE

### Implementation of the 'Sorbonne/Bologna' Process objectives

Direction  
des relations  
internationales  
et de la  
coopération

Sous-direction  
des affaires  
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DRIC B1

#### Preliminary review

The Sorbonne/Bologna process is an inter-governmental initiative which was launched in the Sorbonne university (in 1998), developed and continued in Bologna (1999), then in Prague (2001). The Berlin Conference (2003) was the next stage.

Triggered off by 4 countries in 1998 (Germany, Great-Britain, Italy and France), this initiative in which 30<sup>1</sup> European states are currently involved is aiming at establishing an European Higher Education Area by 2010, with a worldwide degree of attractiveness: it is meant in particular to develop and democratize the students', teachers' and researchers' mobility, to make the recognition of degrees possible throughout Europe, in order to render this education area readable and attractive world-wide.

⇒ For this purpose, 9 objectives were agreed on:

- 1/ readable and comparable degrees;
- 2/ a degree structure essentially based on 2 main cycles;
- 3/ the general use of transferable European 'credits' (ECTS) ;
- 4/ promotion of mobility;
- 5/ promotion of European cooperation in « quality assurance »;
- 6/ promotion of the European dimension in higher education;
- 7/ lifelong learning and training;
- 8/ higher education institutions and students;
- 9/enhancing the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

Bear in mind that these texts initiated in France a new kind of approach:

- ✓ these are 'framework texts' that set up landmarks and objectives and do not curb the teaching teams' innovative spirit into strict 'ex ante' norms, especially as far as teaching contents are concerned ;
- ✓ in doing so, they empower institutions with more autonomy and accountability and as a necessary corollary, lead to an intensified national evaluation.

#### 1/ Readable and comparable degrees

##### A/ The "Diploma Supplement"

In 1999 October 4<sup>th</sup> France ratified the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European region which was signed in Lisbon on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1997 – hence known as the 'Lisbon Convention', in which for the first time the notion of "Diploma Supplement "is mentioned.

France explicitly refers to the ""Diploma Supplement", described as a "diploma's descriptive annex", and to its general use for any student wishing to go abroad: thus, for international mobility purposes, this document will necessarily go along with the

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<sup>1</sup> But there are 32 signatories, since given their federal structure, Germany and Belgium signed twice.

issued 'licence' and master diplomas , « in order to ensure, within the framework of international mobility the readability of acquired learning and skills" (article 2 (4°) decree n°2002-482 of April 8th 2002).

### B/ The validation of studies undertaken abroad

The reform of the prior learning validation (set out in 2002) translates the will to widespread the use of having, in higher education, the students' prior learning taken into account, whether studies (included those undertaken abroad), or acquired vocational skills (which may have been acquired either in France or abroad) are considered. The main idea is to optimize learning paths and to articulate initial and continuing education, because seen from a lifelong learning and training perspective such a dichotomy is no longer meaningful today.

The widened principle of the validation of prior academic learning, which is now written into the Code of education and for which the decree of April 16th 2002 was made for, extends the right to have one's studies undertaken abroad validated by a higher education institution or organism which belongs to the public or private sector, regardless of these studies' conditions and period.

### 2/ A degree structure essentially based on 2 main cycles

In France, the first measures to adjust the higher education system to the principles of the "Sorbonne/Bologna Process " started as soon as 1999 with the creation, on the one hand, of the '*mastaire*' 's degree (which was added to the 3 existing degrees : '*baccalauréat*', '*licence*' - bachelor's degree -, doctorate) and on the other hand, of the professionally-oriented '*licence*' ('*licence professionnelle*') which came up to make the 3 postsecondary years' educational study programmes broader, while implementing the Europe-wide agreed on principle of a professionally-oriented 1<sup>st</sup> cycle.

In 2002, an overall reform of the French higher education system occurred in the perspective of the European higher education area Ministers in charge of Education committed to building up by 2010. One of the most significant legal texts published in April 2002 is the decree (n°2002-482) of April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002 which provides for implementing into the French higher education system the shaping of the European higher education area and therefore defines the main principles underlying the way the whole system is to be set up:

- degree structure in higher education based on 4 degrees (instead of 3) : the '*baccalauréat*'<sup>2</sup>, the '*licence*', the new **master's** degree and the doctorate (hence the common name of the general reform thus introduced and called 'L.M.D.' - LMD standing for '*licence*', master, and doctorate -) ;
- programme structure divided into semesters and modules ;
- general use of the ECTS credit system ;
- 'Diploma supplement' or diploma's descriptive annex issued to any student wishing to do an international mobility.

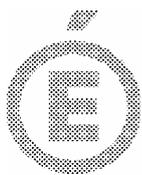
#### **Out of a total of 85 universities, 66 chose to LMD**

Generally an university offers between 1 and 5 master's degrees (main studies courses), divided into special fields, the latter being also divided in options (e.g. master of science and technologies, special field- chemistry, option – material's chemistry etc..)

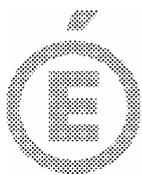
Because of the national time schedule set for the 4-year contracts to be negotiated between the State, universities and other higher education institutions, this **reform should be made real all around the country by the beginning of the 2006 academic year .**

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that the '*baccalauréat*', as a right to access the 1<sup>st</sup>-year university courses, is the 1<sup>st</sup> university degree is indeed one of the particularities of the French higher education system, whose other fundamental characteristic is the 'Universities/ '*Grandes Ecoles*' duality.



**- 80% of the « grandes écoles »' educational and training offers are currently subjected to joint universities and écoles 'habilitations.**



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### **3/ The general use of transferable European 'credits' (ECTS)**

The use of the European transfer credit system (ECTS) - credits referring to capitalizable and credit giving modules according with a Europe-wide agreed on scale of values (that is : 60 credits = 1 year ; 180 credits = a '*licence*' 's degree ; 300 credits = a master's degree) –is currently the rule in France. This legal principle (cf. the above-mentioned April 8th 2002decree) from now on is stated in ministerial notes sent to institutions involved by the 4-year contract process.

The core idea behind it is to increase the readability of studies and degrees in respect to the 'Sorbonne/Bologna logic', and to use the ECTS tool as well (together with a modular curricular structure and prior learning validation) in order to build up '*flexible learning paths*'. Although the reform this way is steering a logic of flexible learning paths, *the national feature of each national degree* is guaranteed by the '*habilitation*' ('accreditation') and the recognition of such a degree by the State which sees to the national coherence of degrees and educational offers and to the complementarity of courses provided on a same location.

With the ECTS initiative a fundamental change is being adopted in France where the new concept of a student's workload must be substituted to the principle of 'hours attended by teachers and students'. Matters are getting off to a good start now and are improving by the new 4-year contracts to be negotiated.

### **4/ Promoting mobility**

A strong commitment to mobility was developed under the French presidency of the European Union, which resulted in the adoption, at the European Council in Nice in December 2000, of an Action Plan for mobility.

The will to make the access to university easier to anyone is reflected into the ongoing Student Social Plan on the one hand, notably with mobility grants rising.

#### **A/ Individual grants**

In France there are all sorts of incentive systems for mobility (students' mobility mainly, and mobility of teachers and researchers as well, or even mobility of administrative staffs). These systems which lead to various individual grants and supports are financed by public funds. The State financial contribution is still greatly prevailing whereas the local authorities' one is, although limited, growing steadily. Recent measures were taken in that field in order to consolidate the grants' system, for students in particular.

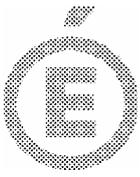
Such a logic of grants to be paid concurrently is a way to promote the access to mobility for young people with low income, and therefore, that makes mobility more democratic, as recommended by the Action Plan for mobility (PAM).

Since 2000, the national support scheme for students in higher education was indeed strengthened by:

- *the tripled financial 'Erasmus top-up' envelope* : in order to promote the students' mobility better;

- *the creation of 'mobility grants'* : this new socially-oriented kind of grant which was created in 2001 is meant to give students who are taking advantage of higher education grants attributed on social criteria, opportunities to go and study abroad, notably in Europe for their training. Whereas 36,000 grants (corresponding to monthly grants of a 384 euros amount) were financed in 2002, 45,000 monthly grants (for an amount of 389 euros per month) are planned to be financed in 2003, that is to say an increase by 25%;

- the gradually broadened right to higher education socially-oriented grants - which are still paid when studying in Europe (ie : see next) - given to 5<sup>th</sup>-year students since last academic year 2002/2003.



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## **5/ Promoting the European cooperation in quality assurance**

### **1/ "Habilitation" and accreditation in France :**

In France, *the national feature of each national degree* is guaranteed by the "habilitation".

Such a notion means the specific decision taken by the State and allowing a higher education institution (HEI) - either a public one, or a private one but recognized by the State such as some business schools - to award national degree(s). Thanks to the "habilitation", the State sees to the national coherence of degrees and educational offers and to the complementarity of courses provided on a same location.

Yet with "Bologna", the "habilitation" is now taken for a limited period of time and based on a **regular** national evaluation of higher education institutions, educational offers and certification systems.

The results from these assessments which are based on courses, the way diplomas are awarded and the whole way a HEI is run (management team, teaching team, research environment, employability of students on the jobmarket ...) are indeed to be taken into account before the decision of "habilitation".

Such a general principle is defined by a legal text about degrees and national diplomas (Decree n°2002-481 / April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002) :

*"Article 4 / Pedagogically and scientifically autonomous higher education institutions are authorised to award on behalf of the State national diplomas by a habilitation decision adopted in the terms set by their own functioning principles.*

*Special regulating arrangements excepted, these decisions are time-limited and submitted to the national evaluation of the educational and certifying institutions and mechanisms. This national evaluation takes into account the institutions' results and the quality of their projects."*

Actually the "habilitation" decision is based on what the national accreditation committees expertised through their assessments of institutions and their courses and degree awarding. (See II/)

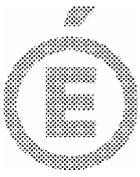
### **2/ A stronger emphasis on evaluation :**

As far as universities are concerned, the 4-year contract legitimacy and efficiency, which was launched in the early '1990s and which binds a university, or another institution concerned by the contract policy, to the State once objectives for action are negotiated, are based notably on a permanent external assessment of all the institution's activities whether these concern management, educational offer and methods, social activities or research.

Generally speaking, while sticking to the principle of an 'ex ante' authorization and the traditional analysis of teaching contents, greater room is to be given from now on, whatever the degree under consideration may be, to the efficiency criteria based on the teaching teams quality and on the analysis of the eventual results, in order to give a label to these studies courses. If international opening is a key element for the assessment of the overall educational offer of a higher education institution, a particular attention, while evaluating Masters and Doctorates, is paid to the international dimension, notably to the quality of transnational partnerships and to the suggested innovations in teaching methods. Bodies in charge of assessment can call on foreign experts in order to perform their missions well.

The care to develop an inner culture for quality assurance in universities led to agree on the principle of having study programmes and teaching methods evaluated while students are associated, and procedures must be set for the evaluation process.

The intensification in the evaluation of higher education courses in France is the consequence of the greater freedom given to institutions - because an 'ex ante' definition of the degree's content is given up -, entitled to design their own educational offers as long as the overall 'LMD' framework is respected.



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## **6/ Promoting the European dimension**

Within the framework of the contract policy, the MJENR is backing up initiatives which are aiming at introducing the European dimension in courses, particularly the internationally-oriented ones and from now on an increasing attention is being paid to the development of "double degrees".

As far as ongoing European pilot projects are concerned, 8 French higher education institutions (7 universities and 1 'Grande Ecole') are participating to 10 of the 11 Joint Master Degrees programs selected for the EUA (European University Association) pilot project; and again 8 French institutions (6 universities and 2 higher education colleges) are involved in the 5 major disciplines which were concerned during the Tuning project's first phase.

## **7/ Lifelong learning and training**

An important reform on the validation of prior professional learning was made in 2002 in order to develop the mobility between student life and professional life and vice-versa, for the sake of a genuine lifelong learning.

The law on social modernization of January 17th 2002 broadened the opportunities to have one's prior professional learning validated in order to get a higher education degree : from now on, in the new system of validation of prior professional skills and experiences (VAE) one is allowed to have not just his/her professional skills validated for the award of a degree, but the skills acquired through socially-oriented or volunteer activities validated just as well ; and it's the whole part of a degree one is looking for, and not the only part of some exams required for it anymore, which he/she can have through VAE.

The law on lifelong training, adopted in 2004 aims at fundamentally restructuring the French training system. The reform on the training system takes into account the results of the collective negotiation, which resulted in the National Interprofessional Agreement, signed on September 20<sup>th</sup> 2003, which created two new mechanisms providing employees training access.

**-The creation of an individual right to training, of 20 hours per year, capitalizable on 6 years.** This new right is activated by the employee's initiative, once the employer has agreed on the chosen training programme.

**-The creation of a training period** which allows the acquirement of a qualification or the participation to a professionally-oriented activity through alternate education/training programs. This period is available for certain categories of employees, mainly those whose qualification is no longer adapted to the evolution of technologies, and to the employees who are in the second half of their career. It can be initiated, either by the employee, or the employer.

## **8/ Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area :**

In order to offer a better welcome to these foreign students, a 'national Council for the development of the students' international mobility' was created in 2003, in order to analyze what was existing and to make any suggestion for further improvement. The State is already promoting the development of single information points in order to avoid foreign students from having many administrative steps, the improved welcome of these students at university with innovative actions in the 4-year contracts framework; and the conditions of entry and residence of students and persons on training coming from non-member States of the European community were recently softened.