

bologna process

NATIONAL REPORTS 2004 – 2005

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1. Main achievements since Berlin

1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms

During the periods BEFORE Berlin conference Latvia has addressed several important Bologna priorities such as 1) introduction of two-cycle degree structure (in 1990s), 2) creation of a quality assurance system with usage of international peers and including accreditation of programmes and institutions (since 1996), 3) overall introduction of credit system for both transfer and accumulation (since mid-1990s), 4) introduction of Diploma Supplement - quite advanced already before Berlin but compulsory to issue to all graduates in Latvian and in English since Jan 1, 2004, ratification of Lisbon Convention (1999) and transposing its principles in national legislation.

AFTER Berlin the main achievements therefore are:

1) degree structure/ qualifications frameworks - in December 2004 Latvian Bologna group has completed work a draft Latvian qualifications framework, national discussion before adoption will start in January 2004.

2) third cycle -

a) National programme for support of doctoral studies and post-doctoral research (mainly in natural sciences and engineering) has been launched with a joint Latvian/ESF funding amounting to 12 million Euros.

b) according to Cabinet regulation of Aug 24, 2004, the scholarships of doctoral students have been increased. To stimulate the interest to complete doctoral studies and defend the thesis the scholarship now has an additional part foreseen for elaboration and defence of the thesis. This part however may be transformed into a loan in case if the candidate fails to defend doctoral thesis within 5 years.

3) social issues - substantial raise of HE staff salaries as of September 2004. Cabinet regulation on the remuneration of pedagogical staff (Aug 24, 2004) stipulates the raise of minimum guaranteed salary for different staff positions between +20% and +120% more benefiting the lower ranks of academic staff. This increase might not be enough to position HE staff high compared to business structures, yet it substantially increases attractiveness of HE staff positions, hence, also interest in doctoral studies.

4) lifelong learning - a national programme has been launched to develop and implement

lifelong learning strategies, the total combined ESF-Latvian funding being 1 million Euro.

2. National organisation

2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies
(For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

Ministry of Education and Science oversees the whole HE sector and is in charge of opening new HEIs and quality assurance.

However, several state HEIs are funded sectorally and closely integrated with the appropriate sector and therefore financially accountable to the appropriate line ministry: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defence

The Higher Education Council is a parliament - approved body of 12 parliament-appointed members.

Some of its main functions are: to work out the national concept for the development of HE, to work out long term development plans of education and research within the HEIs, comment on State budget proposal for the next year, to take decisions upon institutional accreditation.

Rectors' Council is a collegial body comprising all rectors of recognized HEIs. Some of its main functions are: preparing proposals on the perspective development of higher education; evaluating and commenting drafts of HE legislation, representing of HE institutions in Latvia and abroad.

Latvian Student Association is a body representing students' interests. It nominates student participants to Higher Education Council, Accreditation Council, working groups on higher education and it formulates students' views on urgent higher education issues.

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure
(For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

Number s of HEIs

Universities – 5, other institutions offering doctoral degrees - 5,

HEIs offering degrees below doctoral level - 23,

Colleges offering short cycle programmes only – 16

Numbers of students:

State HEIs and colleges 73986 (71%)

Private HEIs and colleges 30078 (29%)

State and private HEIs are regulated by THE SAME laws and other legislative acts; there is no specific legislation for state or private ones.

2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country

(National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

National Bologna group was established in 2004 (before 2004 Bologna activities were organized in a coordinated manner upon initiative of Rectors' Council, Ministry or HE Council). Bologna group comprises representatives of the Ministry of Education & Science,

Rectors' Council, Higher Education Council, HEIs and students. Employers and employees' associations are represented through their HE Council membership. The activities of Bologna group are - elaboration of national Qualifications framework, analyzing developments in HE in Latvia and in Europe and making proposals for actions and legislation changes, organizing dissemination events.

3. Quality assurance

The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

- 1) MoES: oversight and general administration of the quality assurance.
- 2) Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre, member of ENQA, owned jointly by MoES and HEIs. HEQEC organizes the whole process:
 - receives the applications for accreditation of programmes and/or institutions,
 - consults the HEIs/programmes in compiling the self-assessment reports,
 - searches for candidates to act experts in evaluation visits,
 - organizes evaluation visits;
 - organizes publication of the accreditation outcomes
- 3) Accreditation Commission (AC) is the body, which takes decision upon the accreditation of programmes. AC comprises members from MoES; HE Council, Rectors' Council, Student union, employers' organizations and tripartite bodies dealing with professional education.
- 4) Higher Education Council (HEC) - takes decisions upon institutional accreditation. .

3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.

Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.

Latvian QA system does include accreditation - both of programmes and institutions.

Latvian QA follows the scheme:

- self-assessment report by institution/programme,
- peer review visit - no less than 3 peer experts, of which no more than 1 can be from Latvia. Thus, peer groups are ALWAYS including international peers,
- decision upon accreditation of programme/institution (based upon peer evaluation reports). Decision upon accreditation of a programme is taken by the Accreditation Commission, but in case of accreditation of an institution as a whole, - by the Higher Education Council (see 3.1.);
- publishing of accreditation results: self-assessment report, peer review report and the decision are published on the Higher Education Quality Assessment Centre website <http://www.aiknc.lv>

3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.

Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?

Latvian quality assurance system was created in mid-1990s in coordination with similar developments in the neighbouring countries Estonia and Lithuania, and following the

European best practices of the time.

According to Accreditation regulations, out of at least 3 peer review experts only one can be from Latvia. In most evaluations between 1996-2004 the composition of expert teams has been - one Latvian expert, one from Western Europe (or North America) and one from neighbouring countries - Estonia or Lithuania.

Latvian HEQEC is a member of ENQA, INQAHE and of the Central and Eastern European network of quality assurance agencies.

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

The first accreditation in Latvia took place in 1996. By the end of 2002 all the programmes and institutions in Latvia have been through the evaluation/accreditation process. According to Latvian regulations, a non-conditional accreditation is valid for 6 years. During that period the institutions/programmes should submit yearly self-assessment reports. If these reports do not indicate problems, a second accreditation can be carried out in a simplified way - by just one reviewer checking the correctness of information in the self-assessment reports submitted.

4. The two-cycle degree system

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

Implementation of two-cycle system in Latvia started in the early 1990s and was first applied to academic higher education. As of 2001, two-cycle system has been fully implemented also in the professional HE sector, thus introducing bachelor and master degrees in the whole system - with the exception; like in many countries, of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy. Just a small number of programmes leading to professional diplomas with no bachelor degree temporarily remain. These have been accredited for 6 years still in the end of 1990's and they have to be re-organized into BaMa structure before their next accreditation.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

Latvia has signed the Lisbon Convention in 1997, ratified it in 1999. Law on HE establishments (articles 84, 85) and Law on Education (article 11') have been amended, introducing national recognition procedures of degrees and credit points in compliance with the principles of the Lisbon Convention itself and its supplementary texts (Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Recognition criteria and Procedures and Code of Practice in the Provision of Transnational education).

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies

(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

A master degree or equivalent (e.g. degree in medicine) is required for admission to doctoral

studies. Doctoral studies last 3-4 years and are organized as study programmes. The whole programme comprises 216 ECTS credits. The ratio between research and studies is flexible. Yet, the research for the thesis should be no less than 120 ECTS credits (80 Latvian CP) credits but at least 66 ECTS credits (44 Latvian CP) should be advanced studies. It is planned that all the study component of the doctoral programmes will be in a form of organized study courses. This new system is currently being phased in through accreditation of doctoral programmes. During the transition period in some cases greatest part of studies can be independent studies to prepare for the advanced examinations in the chosen field and one in a foreign language.

6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?

(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

Over the last 10 years a huge effort has been made to re-integrate research and higher education. As a result, the 21 (64%) formerly independent research institutes have become parts of the universities. It means that the staff of these research institutes has become university staff and thus have become active in teaching. Students in turn can carry out their thesis research in the facilities of these institutes. At the same time 12 (36%) of research institutes stay independent.

Approximately 50% of the public funding allocated to research is spent in HE sector. Inside HE sector approximately 2/3 of the research funding is allocated to research carried out by the formerly independent research institutes now belonging to universities and the remaining 1/3 of funding in HE institutions as such.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country *(For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)*

The main obstacle for outgoing student mobility is the insufficient financial support available for student grants. Universities are not rich enough to set aside significant support funds, so availability of national support funds for student grants become very important. Such national funds for Erasmus students are available only during the last two years. For students loans are available, this also helps solving financial problems.

Concerning incoming students there still is insufficient interest to come for studies to Latvia. The main obstacles for incoming students are the language and also the fact that Latvian universities are not widely enough known internationally, so they are not always seen as attractive by the foreign students. Not in all Latvian Universities courses are available in English or German, but situation improves year by year.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

To facilitate student mobility from Latvian HEI the government allocated 203,950 EUR for Erasmus student grants for the academic year 2003/2004 and 217,390 EUR for the academic year 2004/2005. For the year 2003/2004 this national support has given 32% increase of Erasmus student mobility.

By law Erasmus student grants are exempt from paying taxes.

To increase incoming student mobility, several Latvian HEI offer courses in English and more courses in English are being developed.
For incoming EU/EEA student's visa problems have been lifted through adoption of the Cabinet Regulation No 914 of Nov 9, 2004, which substantially simplifies procedures and stipulates that incoming students from EU/EEA countries are exempt from any fees for visas or residence permits.

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)

For mobility of outgoing teachers from Latvia the main hindering factor again is the financial support for mobility grants. National funds available for teacher grants are a very important factor, and such national funds for Erasmus teachers are available only since the last two years.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

In Erasmus programme the number of incoming Erasmus teachers is higher than the number of outgoing Erasmus teachers. To make it more balanced and to facilitate teacher mobility, government allocated financial support from national sources for Erasmus teachers 31'019 EUR for the year 2003/2004 and 42'790 EUR for the year 2004/2005
For incoming teachers from EU countries the visa problems are also solved by legislation, see p.7.2.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions

Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

Autonomy is determined in Article 4 the Law on Higher Educational establishments, adopted in 1995. According to articles 4 and 5 of this law, HEIs, among other, independently govern their organisational and administrative structure, content and the forms of studies, main directions of research. HEIs select staff and students. Elaboration of new study programmes is one of the tasks of the HEIs. Yet, admission of students to any new programme can start only after receiving a license from the licensing commission. The latter includes representatives from ministry, HE Council, HEIs and students.

Regarding financing - apart from those students whose studies are funded from state budget, HEIs are free to admit additional fee-paying students and/or provide services and thus generate their own income.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

In order to inform and more deeply involve all levels of staff in Bologna reform process, the issues of European joint HE policies and Bologna process are included

a) in HE staff development programme (according to law, each HE staff member having no formal pedagogical training has to follow this programme), b) in doctoral study programmes.

Employers are involved in the process through:

- participation in the Higher Education Council and Accreditation commission
- participation in expert groups visiting institutions/ programmes at quality assessments,

- employers are in charge of elaboration and approval of professional standards compliance with which in turn is an indispensable component of accreditation of any study programme leading to a professional qualification.

Trade unions are involved through membership in Higher Education Council: one member of the Higher Education Council is a trade unions representative.

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?

(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

State level. Student representatives participate in the Higher Education Council, and in the Accreditation Commission, as well as national Bologna group.

HEI level. According to Law on HE Establishments, students' representation in Senates of HEIs is at least 20% of senate membership (in practice often more).

Faculty level. Student participation in faculty boards is regulated through by-laws of the HEIs, and it is often the same minimum 20%.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

1) the system of study loans allows young people to cover tuition fees and repay them later. There is also a scheme, according to which accepting e.g. teacher jobs for a certain number of years after graduation, the loans may be covered from the state budget.

Limited possibilities also exist to receive loans for covering living costs also, but these are restricted mainly for orphans.

2) While 76% of students in Latvia are paying tuition fees, there are still 24% of state-funded study places that give a chance to talented young people of different economic background to study free of charge.

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

1) substantial measures have been taken for developing e-learning and distance learning courses at Latvian HEIs, especially the bigger universities. E.g. at University of Latvia that accounts for approx. 30% of Latvian students, teachers are remunerated additionally when developing the e-learning versions of their courses. As a result, most study courses can also be acquired through e-learning.

2) Paths for achieving full qualifications in terms of LLL have not yet been developed. However, it will be included through implementation of the just-launched national programme for developing and implementing LLL strategies, mentioned in point 1.1.

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

There are no national procedures for recognition of prior learning as yet. The problem is partly related to some attempts in recent past to use "previously acquired" courses of doubtful quality in order to shorten actual study time. This has created some mistrust in the society and therefore extensive developing of recognition of something acquired outside HE system might not be well accepted. At the same time, on a case- to-case base HEIs may assess

achievements outside HE system and give some number of credits for it.
The task to develop methodologies for recognition of prior learning has been assigned to Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes

There are no specific legal obstacles for joint degrees in Latvian legislation but it is also not specifically encouraging or promoting joint degrees, therefore practical awarding of joint degrees may be difficult. While the need to develop legislation with a view of joint degrees is well understood, due to some unfair transnational education activities that tend to be hidden under different forms of legal international cooperation, including joint degrees, it is at present politically difficult to amend legislation.

11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees

Some higher education institutions are starting joint degree activities as a follow-up to partnerships established through EU mobility programmes. The interest towards joint and double degrees is growing, yet the practice is not widespread. Just a couple of double degree programmes exist. There are some joint study programmes both nationally and internationally, but they usually result in awarding just one degree/diploma.

11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)

The existing examples mainly are jointly developed study programmes where different institutions provide different part of the programme and students move from one institution to another. The studies at partner institutions are recognized by the "home" institution and the "home" institution awards the degree.

11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education

Some examples apart from participation of Latvian institutions in Socrates programme, European networks along subject lines and Tuning project:

- 1) usage of international peers in every review of a programme or HE institution,
- 2) functioning of the Euro-faculty in Latvia,
- 3) functioning of Riga Graduate School of Law which provides master programmes in European law internationally.

11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension (For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)

- 1) Foreign language courses are a compulsory part of all study programmes at all levels - bachelor, master and doctoral.
- 2) Regulations for accreditation of study programmes require that the programme is compared with two similar programmes in other European countries. This requirement ensures that European experiences are taken into account.
- 3) Apart from programmes in European studies as such, European themes are included in

programmes of law, political sciences, economics, management, etc.

4) an important aspect of orientation towards European labour market in 2003 and 2004 has been adaptation of the study programmes leading to qualifications in regulated professions to the requirements of the EU directives. First of all, it has taken place in professions covered by the EU sectoral directives, such as e.g. medical and veterinary professions, architecture, law and others.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA

1. Several Latvian HE institutions developed programmes with English as language of tuition and recruit students from third countries. The main study fields are medicine, dentistry and engineering and most of the students come from Asian countries. Latvian HE representatives participate in educational fairs in Asia to recruit students.

2. A Latvian Rectors' Conference delegation visited Canada on May 8-16, 2004 where, among other activities, gave presentations on the Bologna process in Europe to: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC); Council of Ontario Universities and at Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC).

13. Concluding comments

13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies

The strategic aims declared in the national concept of the development of higher education and the institutions of higher education of the Republic of Latvia till the year 2010 (http://www.aip.lv/eng_concepts.htm) are:

- accessibility of higher education and stable development of the institutions of higher education;
- the system of higher education that serves the needs and the abilities of the Latvian State and is competitive enough within the international scale;
- formation of an opened and democratic society here in Latvia here developing the higher educational system;

As a means for reaching these strategic goals, the National Concept further transposes all the main action lines of the Bologna declaration and outlines concrete solutions needed in Latvia. Concrete challenges for the nearest years are listed in point 13.2.

13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country

The main challenges for Latvian higher education for the nearest years are:

- 1) to rise substantially the number of doctoral students and theses defended - in order to ensure renewal of teaching staff,
- 2) to fully remove the split between academic and professional HE ensuring meaningful bachelor and master degrees across HE system,
- 3) to continue integration of higher education and research, creating doctoral schools at universities,
- 4) to continue solving social issues for staff and students in order to make HE staff positions an attractive employment, to ensure equal access to higher education and to increase student and staff mobility.