

## **Recognition: Challenges for the Bologna Process**

Recognition is one of the corner stones for the Bologna Process, without recognition rest of the activities coming from the Bologna Declaration and Prague Communiqué would be useless.

Recognition is rather a formula for simplifying the understanding of different processes by finding similarities to compare, than an international system. We have European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and Diploma Supplement (DS) – tool to help to translate gained credits and system of explaining the content of achieved education. Those are only means for common understanding. But ECTS and DS are only some examples of many.

Thus I believe we are not building a common European Higher Education Area, rather than a commonly understand network for acknowledging national efforts and processes.

It is said that the Bologna Process in the co-operation with recognition bodies will create greater student mobility, greater simplicity and transparency of degree systems and also greater transparency concerning the quality of higher education offers.

Lets challenge those thoughts!

### **Recognition for Unattainable Mobility**

One obvious way of extending international understanding is experiential, and this is achieved through the number of exchange, study abroad, and travel programmes available mostly to students in the developed world. Nonetheless, in that fact lies an unpalatable consequence. International mobility is expensive and thus much more readily available to those with access to sufficient funds. The greater the mobility created for the relatively wealthy nations of the developed world, the greater the gulf grows between those nations and the poorer countries, in European context Eastern-Europe

with special focus to SEE region. The expansion of students mobility inevitably increases the gap between the “haves” and “have nots”.

There are no recognition obstacles of mobility, but what is the use of recognition in this case, if students can not practise the great opportunity of mobility?

### **Special focus to non-formal learning**

Another challenge comes from the Lifelong Learning, especially from non-formal learning.

Both the non-formal and transnational qualifications require a switch from assessment of input-based indicators to learning outcomes and competencies acquired. It is necessary information for the labour market, higher education institutions, not to mention learners themselves.

Seems that the obstacle for non-formal education is not the international recognition, but the highly debated argument where non-formal education should lead to the award of final qualifications. Then, if the qualifications were recognized nationally, international legal acts would encourage its international recognition.

Another question is weather non-formal learning should lead to the same set of qualifications like used in higher education? Seems that having the same set of qualifications would be a logical solution. That would ensure a proper recognition of qualifications gained through non-formal education in line with the ones acquired in usual way, through formal education.

Some countries are developing national frameworks, which allow seamless movement from one type of education or training to another. Other countries are attempting to improve progression within their existing systems by opening up possibilities to move to and from vocational and general/academic

education, from initial to continuing training, transition from school to work and later from work to studies or training and back, as requires. A number of mechanisms are used: institutions and courses offering dual qualifications which open the way to both higher education and the labour market; access and bridging courses; increased modularisation, credit transfer etc.

How to recognize this mixture of different types of studies and learning?

There is a huge need for developing systems for recognizing and valuing non-formal and informal learning.

### **Increasingly spreading transnational education**

Unlike non-formal education TNE is making tremendous efforts. In addition to the hasty distribution, double diplomas are becoming one of the most used way to provide TNE. Still problems with TNE as such have not disappeared, it starts to involve our every day life more frequently.

There is currently no recognition of TNE per se but rather different modes of recognition but different actors in different purposes for different forms of TNE. This makes the whole process less transparent. Firstly quality assurance and stable recognition for quality assurance across the country should be the prerequisite for recognition. It is crucial cause students must be aware of what they are getting by a TNE programme.

Point for discussion should be weather or not the GATS – General Agreement of Trades in Services – might result in more or less complete recognition of TNE programmes? Mainly due its definition of education as a trade-able commodity and the sections of the treaty dealing with recognition issues, domestic regulation and quality requirements.

## **Urge for co-operation**

As mentioned before, quality assurance plays a crucial role in recognition, therefore co-operation between quality assurance and recognition agencies has to be strengthened and supported. Good example is ENIC and ENQA initiative.

Recognition activities will particularly diversify in the coming years, in the face of the increase in number and diversity of TNE providers, bachelors and masters degree and qualifications framework.

In one hand recognition specialists need a reliable information regarding the quality behind the foreign qualification. On the other hand, the recognition networks on their turn can provide the quality assurance agencies with their deep knowledge of the higher education systems in Europe and beyond.

In near future we will be face up with a huge variety of different qualifications. The introduction of the more flexible Bachelors and Masters degrees` structure leads to a huge diversification in content and function of the degrees involved. Most countries will have "the old" system with different names of qualification and parallel to this a new system with again different names of qualifications. This process requires a deep knowledge of different higher education systems. Apart from different quality of provision qualifications with similar names coming from different countries may differ in their function in the national higher education system, admission and graduation requirements, planned learning outcomes as well as the professional status they give to the holder.

Similarly, employers in the European labour market need to have ways of understanding what they can expect from graduates of higher education systems which are different from those that they are acquainted with. The information available to them must take into account the academic quality and standards of the relevant higher education institutions. Reaching out to the

employers in order to set off long-term co-operation is a challenge which both, quality assurance and recognition institutions, will have to face in near future.

### **For the Conclusion...**

To strengthen the efficient co-operation we **MUST** ensure building a mutual trust and better understanding between stakeholders in the Bologna Process.