

Higher education & professional qualifications and competences

EUROCADRES position paper on the Bologna process

TOWARDS A KNOWLEDGE BASED SOCIETY

Knowledge and innovation are the key factors for the economic development and social progress in Europe. EUROCADRES is convinced that they are essential for our future. However we are far from the objectives of the Lisbon Council in spring 2000, and a lot of efforts need to be made through more coherent policies to be implemented at both national and European levels.

Education and research as important drivers in the knowledge society

Research and education are becoming still more crucial for the economic and industrial policies nationally as well as on European level and for enhancing competitiveness. Research and education are no longer only areas of interest to the providers of research and higher education but also for the whole of society, since they have great impact on competitiveness, growth and employment, key areas for the Lisbon strategy. Furthermore the education of graduates constitutes a central part of the input to innovation and research at universities and in industry.

Education and professional needs: a joint responsibility

Education is not only aimed at meeting short-term professional and labour market needs and requirements. Education plays an important role in science and culture and for personal development. However education has to provide access to qualifications and competences which facilitate a professional career.

Particularly, since more people have not one single life long employment contract but several jobs, employability and the individual's ability to adapt to different working situations and environments becomes increasingly more important. This change of employment conditions together with a strong internationalisation makes it all the more essential that education institutions and social partners find the appropriate ways to secure the employability of current and future professionals.

New actors in higher education

Since higher education is a cornerstone in the transformation of the society from industry to knowledge based, many actors are entering the scene: not only professors and students, but also public authorities and social partners. All actors have to adjust to this new reality: a reality with a greater number of legitimate actors representing interests of society, wanting to give their views on and indications to the direction of the development of higher education in the future. The European project "Tuning" launched a survey which addressed precisely the question on how to develop and fine-tune the relationship between education providers and users in the future.

In recognition and acknowledgement of the many different actors' legitimate views and interests in higher education some member States have set up National Bologna committees where both university teachers and organisations for professionals are represented in order to secure the best possible implementation of the activities set up in the Bologna declaration. EUROCADRES would like to recommend that National Bologna committees, involving the social partners, are set up in member states where such do not already exist.

With more actors interested in higher education and research the whole area is becoming more demand-oriented with new difficulties and with positive developments: new difficulties with more time and discussions needed in order to understand the various approaches; positive developments as more attention is being paid to the importance of higher education and research.

EUROCADRES for synergies between education and economic/social life.

A large number of EUROCADRES members are graduates from university or polytechnics, some of whom are working in higher education or are dealing with education, science and research, others have responsibilities in the economic and social area in society in general. EUROCADRES is a recognised social partner which represents professionals and managers with more than 5 million members throughout Europe in all branches of industry, public and private services and administrative departments.

It is our strong believe that our experience will contribute to improving synergies between education and economic/social life.

STRENGTHENING HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Opening higher education to society

EUROCADRES would like to support the following goals identified by the Education Council, which the educational systems should apply to higher education institutions: high quality, widened access and openness to the world. This includes strengthening exchanges and cooperation between higher education institutions, research institutions and society.

Higher education institutions have an important role to play, not only in giving young people higher education, but also in developing skills and knowledge for the rest of the adult population who may wish to attend further training, which is yet another reason for inviting more actors to participate in the debate on what and how teaching in higher education should be carried out in the future. To this end a strengthening of the funding of higher education institutions is needed.

Towards a European research area

EUROCADRES therefore recommends developing national plans on how to achieve the objective of the Barcelona summit to increase the effort in favour of research up to 3% of the GDP, of which 1 percent should be publicly funded. Additional private funding should be seen as complementary and cannot replace public responsibility. An important and decisive consequence of the Barcelona objective must be to formulate realistic and long-term plans for the expansion of strong research units. EUROCADRES therefore suggests to Member States to introduce multi-annual Finance Act grants to provide a stable economic frameworks for long-term planning for universities.

In addition EUROCADRES supports the development of initiatives aimed at improving the professional development of researchers and particularly to ensure European continuity in mobile career paths. EUROCADRES has submitted

proposals¹ for the preparation of the recent Commission's recommendation on the European charter for researchers and on a code of conduct for recruitment. We are convinced that the results will depend on the implementation, and particularly of the involvement of the social partners in the follow-up and monitoring process.

Towards a European higher education area

The Bologna declaration was signed by 29 European countries in Bologna in June 1999 and so the decision to create a European higher education area was made. A decision which included, in particular, the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, a system with two main cycles (undergraduate / postgraduate) and a system of credits (ECTS), promoting European co-operation in quality assurance and a European dimension in higher education. EUROCADRES supported this development as an important step for improving quality of higher education in Europe as well as establishing the basis for facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas. We would like to emphasise the importance of sustaining free access for students from the first (bachelor) to the second cycle (master).

The European Commission took part in this inter-governmental process progressively. The higher education institutions with EUA "European university association" and EURASHE "European association of institutions in higher education" as well as the "national unions of students in Europe" ESIB were officially involved in the process. Additional meetings also embraced life-long learning and enhanced the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area for other parts of the world. In 2003, at the meeting of the higher education ministers in Berlin, some intermediate priorities for were defined with the will to achieve keys results at the next conference to be held in Bergen in May 2005. A particular focus was put on quality assurance and accreditation, with a specific mandate given to ENQA "European network for quality assurance in higher education". In addition, the ministers recognised the need to involve the social and economic partners in all the appropriate circumstances for the Bologna-process.

In 2004, in coordination with the ETUC "European trade union confederation" and with our colleagues of the ETUCE "European trade union committee for education", EUROCADRES highlighted the urgent need to have a real involvement of the social partners. We hope that a decision, to be taken soon, will involve the ETUCE as a new consultative member active in higher education and that EUROCADRES will be recognised as a partner member of the "stakeholder group"².

Today the Bologna process involves 40 countries. Over time the Bologna-process has developed from being concentrated on internal higher education matters to being more oriented towards issues such as quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications and competences, which are of a broader interest. This is why professionals who have the experience and the knowledge of using and testing the quality of their qualifications and competences daily in their working life should be involved.

IMPROVING PROCESSES FOR ACCREDITATION AND FOR MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND DIPLOMAS

¹ See "EUROCADRES proposals for European researchers" ref.: 04-844 F (May 2004) and ref.: 04-871 (November 2004)

² This would be in line with the recommendation from the Bologna seminar held in Bled in Slovenia in October 2004 on employability, where it was recommended "to strengthening active participation of employers' and trade unions' organisations, as well as professional associations at various levels".

Mobility of professionals, students and teachers

An increasing number of students choose to spend part of their studies abroad but there is very little information on the number of teachers who go abroad to teach. More programmes for teachers to go abroad to teach would be helpful as this would give them new impulses and ideas for teaching students who are more and more European and international oriented.

European and worldwide mobility of professionals is progressively increasing, which is a result of the European unification and the globalisation of the economy. It is a key element for scientific progress. However a number of obstacles remain, related to practical conditions, administrative procedures and to difficulties when returning. The lack of recognition of qualifications is an important obstacle to overcome.

Mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas

EUROCADRES thinks that it is essential to achieve a high quality of education and training in Europe. Mutual recognition of qualification and diplomas is a key element of realising the right of free movement of people, but it is also an important aspect of European citizenship. A Europe of knowledge will only be possible once a real European area of recognition of qualifications and diplomas has been established.

Improvements in this area have been made. The current proposal to merge the fifteen existing directives on regulated professions into one directive is one example³. However it should be made more coherent with the Bologna process, particularly concerning the levels of qualifications. Following the Bologna process, another attempt led to the Bruges-Copenhagen initiative concerning vocational education and training. EUROCADRES knows that regulated professions need specific legal instruments. However the point is that there cannot be a clear distinction between regulated and non-regulated professions: a profession may be regulated in one country and non-regulated in another. In addition, academic recognition is very often the basis for professional recognition. Synergies between academic and professional recognition should be recognised and strengthened.

For these reasons, we think that progress in the field of mutual recognition cannot be made in a disparate way. There is a need for complementary approaches in order to create a clear and coherent European framework with effective instruments for transparency and recognition.

The European qualifications framework announced by the Maastricht meeting of ministers responsible for vocational education and training at the end of 2004 is progress along this line. We hope that its implementation will cover the various areas of education and training and will involve the social partners effectively. In addition and in order to strengthen a coherent approach, there is a need for a better cooperation between the different directorate generals of the European Commission, in this case between the DG for employment, the DG for education and the DG for the internal market.

EUROCADRES calls for an integrated approach in the field of recognition of qualifications and diplomas. It is particularly necessary to:

- involve the social partners in the current initiatives concerning regulated professions and higher education;

³ The proposal for a directive on recognition of professional qualifications for regulated professions envisages the setting up of professional platforms according to which the professions get the opportunity to establish their own profile and standards - and by doing so securing an automatic recognition but it ignores the need to involve the concerned stakeholders.

In addition this proposal suggests to establish a single committee composed of representatives of member States. Since social partners and professional associations are in the best position to know about the existing qualification and competence needs of the professions, they should be included in this committee.

- establish a European body or forum and by this securing a coherent approach of mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas related to higher education. This forum should be based on existing national experiences with the participation of the concerned partners. Developments should be coordinated according to sectors and professions.

Quality assurance and accreditation⁴

EUROCADRES has welcomed the Commission's proposal for a recommendation on quality assurance in higher education and shares the objective to "give a strong impulse to the establishment of a coherent European system of quality assurance which would facilitate recognition of qualifications and promote mobility". EUROCADRES also welcomes the fact that quality assurance is at the top of the agenda of the Bergen meeting in May 2005.

Quality of higher education must meet internal objectives and make use of internal mechanisms. However internal quality must consider the overall environment it is part of and the link between higher education institutions and society as a whole. This is why there is a need for opening the evaluation process and the monitoring to other stakeholders. Furthermore EUROCADRES finds comparable quality criteria and indicators crucial in obtaining the necessary transparency.

Although internal evaluation is the cornerstone of both quality assurance and implementation at the level of the institutions, it is not enough to implement quality assurance processes with the unique purpose of improving the quality of education internally. However indispensable the quality assurance processes are, they cannot stand alone. These quality processes must be concluded by an accountable decision concerning their results, which is the role of the accreditation processes. EUROCADRES sees accreditation not only as a supplementary option to the quality assurance processes, but as a necessary instrument in order to secure real transparency and mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas across Europe.

EUROCADRES supports the Commission's proposal to establish a European register of quality assurance and accreditation agencies and recommends that the register should be divided in two:

- a register for fundamental accreditations which define the basic standards in the main areas and professions at the European level.⁵ Such fundamental accreditation processes contribute to the foundation of mutual recognition and diplomas. They help to avoid the use of non-European standards by establishing common European criteria.
- another register for more specific quality/accreditation processes dealing with specific targets at various levels, in specialised areas.

The management of the register's system must be flexible and must involve the various stakeholders including the social partners.

CONCLUSION

EUROCADRES would like to express its determination to take part in the Bologna process, along the line of its involvement in this area for many years⁶. We welcome the fact that the education ministers have expressed, in the "Berlin communiqué", their willingness to involve the social partners. We are fully

⁴ For more details see "EUROCADRES comments on the proposal for a recommendation on cooperation in assurance quality in higher education (COM(2004)642final" ref.: 05-807 A e (February 2005).

⁵ EUROCADRES is involved in the EUR-ACE project aimed to establish a European accreditation of engineering programmes and graduates. It is an example of this kind of "fundamental accreditation" for a profession.

⁶ See in particular EUROCADRES proposals "for a European area of mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas" ref.: 99-874 C (January 2000).

committed to contribute to this process which is a European challenge for the higher education and for society as a whole.