

Declaration on professional oriented higher education.

To the ministers of Higher Education, present in Bergen (Norway)

Rectors' conferences and associations representing Fachhochschulen from Austria, Germany and Switzerland, Ammattikorkeakoulu from Finland, Hogescholen from the Netherlands, CVU's from Denmark, and Institutes of Technology from Ireland, discussed the Bologna reforms in higher education and decided to present a contribution to the debate focussing on professional higher education. These institutes all have in common that they offer professionally oriented higher education, in first, second, and sometimes third cycle, and contribute to innovation, particularly in their respective regions, by carrying out applied research. It was felt important to come together because the current Bologna process is not articulating clearly enough the importance of professionally oriented higher education and is therefore not performing well enough in the support of

- first cycle degrees having a real meaning in the labour market;
- the main aims of the Lisbon process, namely of increasing the number of students and graduates in higher education;
- the life long learning agenda, for example by offering non-traditional students access to schemes of further and continuing higher education and by upgrading competences of mid-career professionals;
- the link between education and *applied* research
- equal treatment of graduates with a first cycle degree in professional higher education and graduates with a first cycle degree from other programmes in higher education.

We would like to boost the Bologna process by putting some issues high on the agenda.

- The acknowledgement of the existence of various individual learning paths and different orientations of study programmes within the European higher education area, in particular professional first and second cycle programmes and professional doctorate programmes, and of higher education programmes offered within the framework of life long learning;
- the need to identify, at European level, profiles of institutions in the European higher education area, in particular the profile of professionally oriented higher education;
- Integration of the European higher education area not only with the European research area, but with the European area for research and innovation, thus broadening the spectrum of research activities of higher education institutes and strengthening the connection with regional development;

Profile

The institutions signing this declaration all have a similar profile. Profiling of institutions was introduced into the Bologna process by the working group on qualifications frameworks of the Bologna follow-up group (December 2004). The profile of our institutions can be described as follows:

1. We are public higher education institutions, within a binary or unified system of higher education. We offer first cycle higher education programmes with direct access to the labour market, because our study programmes are labour market-oriented (including practical periods and internships). The majority of our students enter the labour market after their first degree (bachelor). Many study programmes offer graduates the possibility to work in a (EU) regulated profession, and many of them are (professionally) accredited;
2. We offer programmes for further and continuing education, in most cases second cycle programmes, such as professional master programmes, therefore it is our mission to deliver a strong contribution to life long learning within the European higher education area. We work for maximising the number of students in European higher education, by employing schemes of acknowledgment of prior experiential learning (APEL), flexible study programmes, specific admission routes from the vocational education and training sector, and forms of shorter higher education programmes;
3. We focus our research activities on applied research, and research activities are undertaken in close co-operation with the relevant sector in the labour market. Research is carried out and disseminated in knowledge networks. They play a strong role in their region, serving the regional labour market with up-to-date knowledge and knowledge workers.

It is essential to integrate profiles of institutions, such as this professional higher education, as an optional element within the European framework of qualifications. Such a recognition of profiles would greatly advance transparency of European higher education area and offer better chances of institutes for co-operation, mobility, and joint curriculum development. We envisage the development of different profiles like this one, thereby enhancing the strength of the European higher education area by making its diversity known and making it more useful for a larger group of stakeholders and participants.

The Bologna process needs a stronger focus on Lisbon

The organisations supporting this declaration that come from an EU member state want to make clear that the report of the high level group led by Wim Kok on the Lisbon strategy (Facing the challenge, Nov. 2004) has shown that there is too little progress in obtaining the Lisbon goals by 2010. This is also true for higher education. We believe that the European higher education area should devote its energy to obtaining the Lisbon goals, and that the Bologna process should concentrate on reaching the main Lisbon targets. The Lisbon goal of 50% participation is particularly important in this respect. We need to support higher education institutes that aim for maximum participation and are able and willing to take up more students. Of course, both funding and adequate regulations are needed to reach this goal. Secondly, a real contribution should be made to the life long learning agenda, not only the usual lip service. This implies full recognition of APEL schemes and creation and strengthening of learning paths and learning methods to accommodate non-traditional, older and part-time students. And thirdly, support should be given to those institutions that focus on applied research.

Professional orientation is possible and needed in all three cycles

The need for professionals educated at higher education level is evident all over Europe, and in fact many if not most students in Europe are studying in institutions and/or study programmes of professional higher education. In order to make full use of the competences of these students, professional first cycle (bachelor) degrees should be fully recognised and respected as equal to research oriented first cycle degrees. Recognition should include the opportunity for graduates from first cycle degrees in professional higher education to continue their studies directly into the second cycle of professional or other types of study programmes.

Professionally oriented programmes in higher education should not be restricted to the first cycle. Increasingly, institutes of higher education start developing professional programmes in the second cycle. These professional master programmes will make a strong contribution to educating our population to meet the Lisbon challenge, not only offering students a direct opportunity to continue their studies after a bachelor programme, but also by offering education possibilities to mid-career professionals in further and continuing education. The professional master programme needs to be fully recognised within the Bologna process, next to other master programmes. This implies adapting the vision on master programmes emerging from previous Bologna meetings such as the Helsinki meeting in May 2003.

Within the third cycle (doctorate level), professional streams can be distinguished as well. Institutions within the UK, and in some countries outside Europe, offer professional doctorate programmes where research work is carried out in close co-operation with the particular sector in the labour market, to which the programme is directed. Some of the European schools of arts also offer doctoral degrees with artistic and research options. The artistic options are clearly professional, albeit representing a highly specialised kind of profession. We believe it is important to work on an improvement of the stream of professionally oriented higher education for all three cycles, also taking into account the link with the sector of vocational education and training. Professionally oriented higher education is not only intended to deliver highly skilled labourers, but also acts as an important player for the advancement of the professions themselves, innovating the labour market and updating skills and competences.

Applied research with a regional focus

Institutes offering professionally oriented higher education are, like all higher education institutions, combining education with research. Research in our institutes is applied research. It is developed in close co-operation with organisations and companies active in the relevant sector of the labour market. The institute acts as an important part of the knowledge circle in a region, thereby adapting, innovating and modernising organisations and companies in the region using new knowledge. Research questions of companies are taken up by our institutes, and innovations are absorbed by the market. At the Berlin conference, the link between the European higher education area and the

European research area was confirmed. We believe this to be a good development, but we stress the need to take a broad perspective with the term research, including applied research in the definition, and we would like to refer to the recently created concept of the European research and innovation area. Existing and new EU programmes on research should combine the support of both fundamental and applied research, and stimulate the exchange between the two. Again, a varied European landscape is the best option, with institutions focussing on fundamental research of global competitive level and with regional institutes carrying out applied research and serve the local market, and institutions operating in between these two poles.

This declaration calls upon the ministers, coming together in Bergen (Norway):

- to fully put the Bologna process in the context of achieving the Lisbon objectives, and to introduce elements in the Bologna process that facilitate obtaining these objectives, such as more financial support and better regulations for life long learning schemes and maximum participation in higher education;
- to enter profile as an optional element into the European framework of qualifications and call upon networks and organisations to elaborate different profiles of institutions;
- to stress the importance of professional first cycle and second cycle degree programmes and to recognise them as fully equal to other degree programmes, enabling easy transfer from professional to research oriented programmes and *vice versa*. The professional doctorates (in the third cycle) being implemented or planned in some countries should be analysed in order to find their proper place in the higher education system.
- to decide not only to improve the integration of the European higher education area with the European research area, but also with the European research and innovation area and so strengthening innovation activities of higher education institutions.

We want to contribute to these new Bologna activities by elaborating a descriptor of our profile of professional higher education for the European qualifications framework, and call upon all institutions and organisation that are also engaged in this profile to join us in that exercise.

The following organisations and groups endorse this declaration:

CVU-Rektorcollegiet, Denmark	Dr. K. Munsgaard, chairman
Mitgliedergruppe Fachhochschulen in der HRK, Germany	Prof. Dr. E. Mielenhausen, spokesman
Council of directors of Institutes of Technology, Ireland	Mr. J. McGarry, secretary-general
HBO-raad, vereniging van Hogescholen, the Netherlands	Drs. N. Verbraak, acting president
Österreichische FachhochschulKonferenz, Austria	Prof. Mag. W. Jungwirth, president
Arene, Finland	Dr. P. Rauhala, president
Konferenz der Fachhochschulen, KFH, Switzerland	Dr. M. Hodel, president