The Bologna Process and the EHEA: achievements, aspirations, and challenges ahead
16 June 2017

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Overview

1. Developments in Bologna Process
2. Key Issues
3. Future prospects and challenges
What is the Bologna Process... and what is it for?

Broad framework and goals for creating and developing European Higher Education Area

Ministers review progress, and agree new policy actions every 2/3 years

Communiqués are full of good ideas & good intentions..
Summary of Bologna Communiqués

We the Ministers...

Agree to make European higher education the most innovative, dynamic, competitive and best in the world, providing students with the highest quality research-based programmes, with innovative and fully quality assured teaching evaluated against robust European standards, and based on transparent learning outcomes. Equity and equal opportunities are at the heart of our social dimension policy, ensuring that anyone with potential and the desire to study will access and succeed, while also experiencing life-enhancing mobility, where learning, whether acquired formally or informally, will be fully recognised. Employability is embedded in every programme so that all graduates will go on to find stimulating and fruitful employment benefiting themselves and future generations etc.
Bologna achievements are significant..

- 3 cycle structures introduced
- QA revolutionised
- Curriculum development modernised
- Mobility more commonplace
- Common tools developed and used
  (ECTS; ESG; DS; NQFs)
Yerevan Conference and Communiqué

- An (unexpected) success
- More engagement from Ministers/high level policymakers
- More national participation than at previous Ministerials
- Feeling that there is a new start
Progress with Bologna tools...

ECTS Users Guide: led by the Commission
Very clear, user-friendly update

ESG 2.0: led by stakeholders (& influenced by Commission)
Updated, and more policy relevant

QA of Joint Programmes: led by specialist stakeholders
A major change – prioritising European objectives over national procedure. But will it be implemented?
Teaching and learning

• Until Yerevan teaching and learning treated as a by-product of policy (3 cycles, quality assurance, widening participation etc)
• Now made a central objective: why the shift?
• Concerns about massification, and recognition that increasing numbers hasn't led to widening participation
• Impact of new digital technologies – not considered in policy
Quality Assurance

• Dynamic evolution continues…
• However, lack of attention to social dimension
• Participation of stakeholders sometimes still problematic
• Slow progress in allowing EQAR-registered agencies to work across EHEA
Student participation in QA

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Openness to cross border QA

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And there are wider concerns...

Not all countries have engaged with reforms
In other countries, some aspects of reforms are neglected
Some topics – social dimension - have seen commitments made, but little action has followed

Some voices suggest that the process has had its day...
Are they right?
EHEA Context

- **Economic crisis**: clear impact on funding and jobs
- **Expansion**: generally continuing (but not everywhere)
- **Demography**: decline of younger populations, and refugee situation

-> Bologna must be a response to these challenges
Bologna Direction of travel

Agenda setting

Legislative reform

(non) Implementation
Why is implementation proving so challenging?

- Lack of broad societal dialogue/understanding -> lack of commitment
- New challenges as a result of (poorly implemented) reforms
- Resistance to reforms
- Other issues to face – eg post crisis issues
• Nature of Bologna process and its commitments misunderstood
• Voluntary process with (almost) no legal mechanisms
• Does not imply that countries can do as they choose..

But what can be done if countries fail to act on commitments?
Government attitudes / responses to implementation problems

- Avoidance (it's up to HEIs)
- Questioning EHEA policy goals (to which they signed up)...
- Apathy...
- Increasingly technocratic behaviour (leave experts to discuss QFs, recognition instruments, QA, ECTS etc)
What can we look forward to in 2018?

Action to address non implementation

Attention to values, autonomy and academic freedom

But political realities - Belarus accession, Turkey, CEU etc – all risk undermining Bologna statements

Fundamental purposes of European cooperation in higher education will be in the spotlight
Bologna process needs to prove be an expression of common will to ensure that the EHEA works for students, staff and societies.

Effort needed to support it and improve implementation

Bologna is difficult, complex and often frustrating. An alternative – no EHEA, no common space for discussion and agreement on purposes - is much worse...