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**CLUSTER “MODERNISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION”**

**Summary report of the Peer Learning Activity on  
Planning and Implementing Curricular Innovation:  
Structure, Content and Incentives**

*Oslo, 9-11 October 2006*

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*Report approved by the Cluster*

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## Executive Summary

On 9-11 October 2006, a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on Planning and Implementing Curricular Innovation, hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, was held in Oslo. This PLA was organised for the Cluster on “Modernisation of Higher Education” cluster within the framework of the implementation of Education & Training 2010.

Next to the hosting country Norway, eight countries participated in the PLA: BE-FL, BG, CZ, ES, IS, SI, SK and the UK.

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Science prepared a programme which included focused and open contributions by: representatives from the NO ministry, the University of Oslo (leadership, research/teaching staff and students) and stakeholders.

Norway was considered a suitable choice for a PLA on curricular reforms as the Norwegian Higher Education System has implemented the full Bologna-package (curriculum, quality assurance, ECTS/DS, etc) under “The Quality Reform” framework. This was combined with changes in governance and funding (both for HEIs and student finances) over a two-year period from 2001. The PLA learned about the policies, the implementation process and the impact of this comprehensive reform. Structural changes in Norway are in place, but changes in the attitude of HEIs, staff and students, are still needed. The structural reforms provide the basis for a real change in paradigm centred on quality enhancement, innovation and effectiveness in view of the changing needs of society. Real cooperation with stakeholders in society is just starting.

The PLA proved to be successful in a number of ways:

- A very interesting and well organised programme by the NO host. Presentations on the Norwegian reforms were straight-forward, open and frank.
- Participants were keen to take part in the PLA and well prepared. Following the instructions from the Commission, all participating countries produced a national report and provided a theme-oriented presentation that focussed on the real national issues. Presentations of the reports motivated focused and lively discussions among participants.
- Based on a summary of main issues at the end of each day and a daily "blank" questionnaire filled in by participants, a shortlist of key lessons and recommendations was made up. This new instrument proved very helpful in guiding the PLA towards a joint conclusion that was carried by all participants.

Considering the procedure of this PLA and the opinion of participants, some suggestions would be advisable for improving the PLA working method, these are listed under Paragraph 2.1.

The key lessons and recommendations coming from this Peer Learning Activity focus on six broad, interrelated areas: 1) comprehensive reform, 2) implementing curricular reform, 3) governance, autonomy and stakeholders' involvement, 4) incentives and funding, 5) accreditation and 6) relevance of new degrees. (See Chapter 3)

## Introduction

On 9-11 October 2006, a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on Planning and Implementing Curricular Innovation, hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, was held in Oslo. This PLA was organised in response to the needs of participants in the “Modernisation of Higher Education” cluster within the framework of the implementation of Education & Training 2010.

Eight countries participated in the PLA: BE-FL, BG, CZ, ES, IS, SI, SK and the UK. They were represented, in most cases, by both a policymaker from the ministry and a representative from a HEI.

Norway was considered a suitable choice for a PLA on curricular reforms as the Norwegian Higher Education System has implemented the full Bologna-package (curriculum, quality assurance, ECTS/DS, etc) under “The Quality Reform” framework. This was combined with changes in governance and funding (both for HEIs and student finances) over a two-year period from 2001. The PLA learned about the policies, the implementation process and the impact of this comprehensive reform. Structural changes are in place, but changes in the attitude of HEIs, staff and students, are still needed. The structural reforms provide the basis for a real change in paradigm centred on quality enhancement, innovation and effectiveness in view of the changing needs of society. Real cooperation with stakeholders in society was only just starting.

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Science prepared a programme (based on the Commission format) which included focused and open contributions by: representatives from the NO ministry, the University of Oslo (leadership, research/teaching staff and students) and stakeholders.

As preparation for participation in the PLA, participants were asked to send in a brief national report on the PLA-theme beforehand, taking into account the following issues:

- 1. National Policy developments and incentives:** the influence of state policies on the introduction of the three-cycle structure, approach and incentives in the process, the development of a national qualification framework, and factors promoting curricular innovation at national, institutional or programme level.
- 2. Institutional response to curricular reform:** the acceptance of policies regarding curricular reform by institutions (academics, administrators, students), institutional autonomy to make curricular changes and related incentives, the consideration of the Bologna process as an opportunity for change, and factors inhibiting curricular innovation at national, institutional or programme level.
- 3. Content of curricular reform:** the adjustment of curricula (content, methodologies, organisation, learning paths, etc) to the three-cycle structure and in terms of competencies and profile, workload, learning outcomes, labour market orientation, etc, and the changes that students have experienced as a consequence of the curricular reform.
- 4. Impact of curricular reform:** impact (or expected impact) on access, mobility, graduation and employability.
- 5. Measuring the performance of curricular reform:** approaches in measuring the performance following curricular reform, quality assurance mechanisms and cost-effectiveness indicators in place.

**6. Lessons learned implementing curricular reform:** lessons learned in each country in terms of curricular reform that can be applied to other European countries.

This report is subdivided into 4 sections.

Section 1 (Key issues on Curricular Reform) provides an outline of relevant policies and issues at stake regarding curricular reforms.

Section 2 (The Peer Learning Activity) is about the PLA programme and provides outlines of the presentations, site visits and discussions and makes recommendations about the procedure of PLAs.

Section 3 (Participants' contributions regarding curricular reform) is a summary of the national reports on the PLA-theme produced by participants as preparation for the PLA.

Section 4 (Lessons learned and recommendations) is about the key issues learned from the Peer Learning Activity and focuses on six areas: 1) comprehensive reform, 2) implementing curricular reform, 3) governance, autonomy and stakeholders' involvement, 4) incentives and funding, 5) accreditation and 6) the relevance of new degrees.

## 1. Key issues on Curricular Reform

The “Modernisation of Higher Education” Cluster has been created within the framework of the implementation of Education & Training 2010. The first Council/Commission Joint Report on the implementation of E&T 2010 established the priority fields of action to enable the education and training sectors to contribute to the success of the Lisbon Strategy. The second Interim Report on the implementation of E&T 2010, adopted by the Commission in November 2005 on the basis of contributions from Member States on progress achieved, draws specific attention to the higher education sector.

In the meantime, the role of universities in the success of the Lisbon Strategy has been further emphasised in the Commission’s Communications “Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation”<sup>1</sup> (May 2006) and its predecessor “Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling higher education to make its full contribution to the Lisbon goals”<sup>2</sup> (April 2005). These documents set out the main areas of change/reforms needed in the Union’s higher education systems and institutions.

The Commission’s Communication “Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation” sets nine key messages considered to be essential to success within the Lisbon agenda. These vary from curricular reform to the reform of governance and funding. These messages coincide with the tasks the Cluster members identified at the first meeting in April: curricular reform, funding and governance. Among their activities, the cluster identified a limited number of areas where a “Peer-Learning Activity (PLA)” would be advisable. The planning and implementation of curricular reform was one of them.

The issue-paper on curricular reform within this cluster addresses key issues on higher education curricular reform in the EU. It recalls the relevant policy statements, describes the issues at stake and formulates some key questions the cluster might wish to address.

*The issues at stake* are focused on European Qualification Frameworks and learning outcomes and competences, curricular design, employability and universities as Open Learning Centres.

### European Qualification Frameworks – Learning Outcomes and Competences

- European frameworks should allow readability, comprehensibility and diversity at European and national level. Individual institutions should have considerable freedom in the design of their programmes. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Higher Education (Bergen, May 2005) and the overarching EQF for Lifelong Learning (Commission Consultation document, July 2005) are potential frameworks.
- The translation and implementation of the EQF into National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) deserves special attention. The same goes for a series of Sectoral EFQ (ICT Sector, building sector, para- and medical professions etc.). The Commission will launch a special Call in April/May to support the establishment of national and sectoral qualification frameworks. The project “Tuning Educational Structures in Europe” will help to provide input for the higher education levels (5 to 8) of the sectoral EQF, with descriptors which define learning outcomes and competences for different levels and disciplines.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2006)208 final of 15.05.2006

<sup>2</sup> COM(2005)152 final of 20.04.2005

- The practical use of Learning Outcomes and Competences in curricular design, teaching, learning and assessment is new to most academics and will require a lot of training and the exchange of experiences, bearing in mind differences in language and pedagogical culture.
- The system based on three cycles would seem to be open. Some proposals include three main cycles and a short cycle within or linked to the first and third cycles. Although three cycles are all that is required at European level, shorter higher education linked to the first and third cycles is considered to be a vital part of the Lifelong Learning continuum. There are some concerns regarding how these qualifications are labelled.

### **Curricular design**

- *Joint and double Degrees.* Joint Degrees in Europe are currently being considered as innovative examples of inter-university cooperation and as the pillars of future European higher education development. They are hampered by the considerable diversity of structures among degree programmes as well as by certain difficulties which still remain with regard to recognition.
- Challenging, but not overloaded curricula, striking a balance between what it is necessary to teach and what can be learned. Overlong study durations and high drop-out rates ought to be reduced.
- *Specialisation of Higher Education Institutions.* Diverse institutional and curricular profiles should be possible, particularly at postgraduate level (master and doctorate).
- More structural use of mobility in study programmes. Special attention to ways of improving teacher mobility.

### **Employability**

- The employability of graduates needs to be improved and to achieve this, cooperation with professional associations and employers is needed. So far, their involvement in curricular reform has been very limited.
- *Employability of graduates.* Every young person leaving school or university should be offered a job, apprenticeship or additional training within six months of becoming unemployed by the end of 2007, and within 100 days by 2010. To help to achieve this goal, entrepreneurship education should be provided as part of the curriculum for all students.
- *The Bachelor profile needs to be clarified,* as does the extent to which Bachelor degrees are fully accepted by the labour market and, what distinguishes Bachelor and Master Degrees. The design of the new degrees is not only a problem of the designers but also of those who have to employ the new graduates. To this effect, it may be helpful if results from graduate employment studies can be used for curriculum development.

### **Universities as Open Learning Centres –validation - recognition**

- Universities could become *Open Learning Centres* for their region, with learner-friendly assessment centres providing quick and fair assessment and validation for prior learning. They would offer individualised and flexible learning paths, with modules as a key element in lifelong learning curricula. This would help to increase employment rates for an ageing population and adopt a *lifecycle approach* to employment, with people of all ages offered the support they need.
- A system for the accumulation and transfer of credits (ECTS) to facilitate international student mobility, international curriculum development and recognition, also aided by the

widespread use of the Diploma Supplement (DS). ECTS and the Diploma Supplement have been legally introduced in most member states, but implemented irregularly without fully understanding their pedagogical function in terms of curricular reform.

- A system of credits for lifelong learning needs to be developed for the entire education and training system, for higher education (including doctorate studies) as well as for vocational education and training (VET) and possibly schools as well. It is necessary to have a reliable system of credit points so that it will be possible for each learner to “earn”, regardless of the learning institution. The integrated systems could build on ECTS and the current development work on ECVET.

With regard to *relevant policy statements*, some key messages in the Commission’s Communication “Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation” are particularly related to curricular reform and the issues addressed in the working programme of this PLA. These messages are: Break down the barriers around universities in Europe, ensure real autonomy and accountability for universities and provide the right mix of skills and competencies for the labour market. In these messages, the Commission suggests some key changes in order to ensure success:

- Break down the barriers around universities in Europe
- Ensure real autonomy and accountability for universities
- Provide the right mix of skills and competencies for the labour market

Many of these issues have been addressed or touched upon in this PLA.

## **2. The Peer Learning Activity**

### **2.1 Procedure of the PLA and recommendations**

All participants expressed their satisfaction and gratitude for both the process and the outcomes of the PLA. The PLA proved to be successful in a number of ways:

- A very interesting and well organised programme by the NO host. Presentations were shared by the NO ministry, the University of Oslo (leadership, research/teaching staff and students) and stakeholders, thus giving different perspectives on Quality Reform. Presentations were straight-forward, open and frank.
- Participants were keen to take part in the PLA and well prepared. Following the instructions from the Commission, all participating countries produced a national report and provided a theme-oriented presentation that focussed on the real national issues. The diversity of their backgrounds and the differences in the state of play of reforms did not have a negative influence on the PLA.
- Presentations motivated focused and lively discussions among participants.
- At the end of each day, the consultants made a summary of the main issues and participants were asked to fill in a “blank” questionnaire, indicating the lessons learned during the day and providing comments. At the end of the last day, participants were asked to give their opinion regarding the development of the PLA and suggest improvements on the methodology.
- The following morning, the consultants delivered a written summary of key lessons and recommendations based on the questionnaires. This new instrument proved very helpful in guiding the process of the PLA towards a joint conclusion that was carried by all participants.

Considering the procedure of this PLA and the opinion of participants, some suggestions would be advisable for improving the PLA working method:

- The introduction of a “blank” questionnaire at the end of each day where participants indicate the lessons learned during the day and provide comments should be adopted as part of PLA methodology.
- A written summary of key lessons and recommendations learned the previous day (based on the consultant summary and the questionnaires) is very useful for guiding the PLA towards joint conclusions.
- Participants’ presentations need to be focused on the given theme avoiding general system descriptions. A closer follow-up of the presentations by the Commission/consultants before the PLA might be advisable.
- Although visits allow for information exchange and illustrate specific aspects of the PLA theme, the goals of the visits should be specified and time should be allocated for reflection on the lessons learned during the visits.
- An effort should be made on all sides to meet deadlines. The PLA would benefit from having all documentation well in advance (country reports, background information,

summary of the country reports and instructions about the country presentation). In addition, hand-outs of the presentations would be helpful during the PLA.

- It would be advisable to develop links between the PLA participants in order to share information about the impact of the lessons learned from the PLA on country policies and in order to contribute to the networking of governments and HEIs within the Lisbon Agenda.

## **2.2 Minutes**

### **Sunday 8 October**

#### **Meeting at the hotel:**

Participants were welcomed by the representatives of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and the European Commission. After the welcome and introduction to the PLA, participants introduced themselves and presented their expectations of the PLA. Practical information and documentation for the PLA (Final programme, summary of the country reports and country reports, and the OECD report on Thematic Review of Tertiary Education in Norway) was also provided in this meeting.

### **Monday 9 October**

#### **Welcome at the Ministry of Education and Research:**

Mrs. Toril Johansson, Director General for Higher Education, welcomed participants.

#### **First session: The pre-reform setting of Norwegian higher education: strengths and challenges.**

Mrs. Toril Johansson, Director General, presented a summary of the situation of the Norwegian Higher Education before the reform. She focused her presentation on three main areas: the degree structure, the mode of delivery and governance in HEIs. She explained the main traits of the system and its main problems: complex degree structure, teaching oriented, focused on final examinations, excessive delays and drop-outs, lack of a modern system of quality assurance, incremental funding, scarce operative autonomy, etc. In order to look for solutions to all these problems, the Quality Reform was undertaken in 2001 after the preparation of a White Paper, governmental decision and parliamentary discussions. The process was undertaken by three different governments from different political parties. This gives an idea of the high level of national consensus on the need to implement reform. In fact, the system was ready for change, and the Bologna process helped to reinforce reforms.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

#### **Second session: Planning comprehensive reform: objectives and processes.**

Mr. Rolf Larsen, Deputy Director General, presented a summary of the Quality Reform undertaken by the Norwegian Government. The reasons for the Quality Reform were twofold: to achieve improved quality in higher education and research and the Bologna Process and Norway's obligations in that respect.

The preparations for the Quality Reform started in 1998, prior to the Bologna Declaration, when the Norwegian Government appointed a Royal Commission to examine the higher education

system. A Green Paper was submitted in 2000, and a White Paper was approved by Parliament in 2001 with a high level of political consensus. The necessary legislative changes were introduced as from 1 July 2002. The Norwegian Parliament decided that the Quality Reform should be fully implemented at all higher education institutions from 2003.

The main objectives of the reform were:

- To reform the degree structure following the Bologna process
- To increase institutional autonomy
- To improve institutional governance
- To improve funding through a new funding formula for the institutions
- To develop internationalisation
- To improve financial support and guidance for students.
- To develop a quality assurance system

In addition, an umbrella project was launched by the Government in 2001 which comprised 19 sub-projects (e.g. Quality Assurance Agency, Funding Structure, Changes to the Act on HE, etc.) in order to provide input to the process. All sub-projects reported to one steering-group in the Department of Higher Education and were managed by one project coordinator. The whole project was evaluated by an external group and through a survey among the Ministry staff.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

### **Third session: Critical factors in planning and implementing reforms at policy level**

Representatives from Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain presented some of the problems being faced in these countries with regard to implementing curricula reform policies at national level. The presentations were based on the national reports which are included in the following section of this report.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

### **Fourth session: What governance and monitoring tools are needed to show the performance of the system?**

Mr. Bjørn Stensaker, Programme Director of the Research Institute NIFU STEP, made an initial analytical overview of the reform reflecting on the tools available to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the system. He put forward a complementary, somewhat critical but also positive view of the reform.

He mentioned that traditionally, Norwegian higher education did not place strong emphasis on effectiveness, quality and results. The reform wants to give more autonomy to institutions, but on the other hand requires more quality, a better use of funding, better organisation and a greater emphasis on results.

He posed some challenges and dilemmas regarding the relationship between performance indicators, funding and institutional change and the cost/benefits of an expanding monitoring system.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

### **Fifth session: Measuring the performance of curricular reform**

Representatives from the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom presented some of the problems being faced in these countries with regard to measuring the performance of curricular reforms. The presentations were based on the national reports which are included in the following section of this report.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

### **Sixth session: Summary and general debate**

The objective of this final day session was to summarise and discuss what the group had learned throughout the day from both the host and the participant countries.

The session started with an interpretative summary presented by the consultants followed by a lively discussion among the participants.

- During this first day, the Quality Reform implemented in Norway was presented and emphasis was placed on policy design, objectives and the first steps of the national implementation.
- Participants learned about the problems that the Norwegian Higher Education System faced at the end of the 90's when the design of the QR started. Those problems were similar to those that many other European higher education systems faced or in some cases are still facing now: a teaching oriented system; too many delays; too many drop-outs; weak links with the labour market and with the current needs of modern societies and so on.
- The QR was a comprehensive reform. This is the most important aspect of this reform. The Bologna process has been used as an additional opportunity for changing the curriculum structure, but a full reform of the system was carried out at the same time, changing the governance model, the funding model, the student aid system, etc.
- Additionally, the reform was carried out with ample political and social consensus. In particular, the collaboration of stakeholders was enhanced and this has been relevant in the implementation of the reform.
- Generally speaking, the reform is trying to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of the system. Nevertheless, it is still early to draw conclusions about the results.

## **Tuesday 10 October**

### **Welcome at the University of Oslo**

Inga Bostad, Professor and Vice-Rector for Education, welcomed participants and made a short introduction to the University of Oslo (UiO)

### **First session: Public policy and institutional responses: Planning and implementing curricular innovation**

Academic staff and one post-graduate student of the UiO made presentations describing the implementation of the QR in the UiO. They highlighted the fact that the reform was designed by the government in a short period of time and, although it was considered to be a positive catalyst for change, it has required hard work from academic staff, administrators and students. In the UiO, the leaders of the institution were committed and regarded the QR as an opportunity for

change. This was considered to be a key element for successful reform at institutional level. In addition, student representatives were involved in the process.

In order to encourage the reform, an Inspiration Week was held at the UiO as part of a communitarian strategy. It was regarded as a big event and an interesting tool to inspire more reluctant sectors.

In their opinion, the main consequences of the changes at institutional level have been:

- Closer follow-up of students
- More feed-back from lecturers
- More use of ICT
- New system of student evaluation
- More international programmes
- More international exchanges
- Introduction of many courses in English

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

### **Second session: Dialogue-based and consensus-oriented public policy – rhetoric or reality? Panel discussion.**

The problems observed in the implementation of the QR in UiO were discussed by the previous speakers and the participants. The conflict between a mere structural change and deeper reform was discussed. Some academics saw potential risks in empowering students. The risk of designing programmes with a highly student-consumer orientation was also mentioned. The importance of designing programmes within a broad lifelong learning agenda specifying learning outcomes and their relevance to the labour market was emphasised.

### **Third session: Site visit to the University Library and the *Sophus Bugges Hus* Learning Centre.**

A short visit to both institutions allowed participants to discover how auxiliary services have been reformed in order to provide greater support for the reform implemented in the university. It is hoped that more attention to the students' self-learning process and more emphasis on student guidance should lead to an increase in the use of these facilities.

### **Fourth session: How does the system perform?**

Mr. Per Olaf Aamodt, Special Advisor of the Research Institute NIFU STEP and member of the group of researchers evaluating the Norwegian Quality Reform gave a presentation on the initial results of the reform. The evaluation project was launched by the Ministry, which decided on the evaluation topics: implementation of the degree structure, pedagogical reform, governance and steering, internationalisation, incentive-based funding model, quality assurance and student performance.

Provisional indicators show a positive response of HEIs and the creation of more vocational oriented, modularised and multidisciplinary programmes. However, new concerns have arisen with regard to the increasing number of examinations, very little reduction in drop-out rates during and after the first year of study, no significant increase in study effort (measured in hours per week), etc. Although preliminary results have been presented to the PLA, the presenter mentioned that was too early to draw definitive conclusions regarding the long-term effects of curricular reforms.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

### **Fifth session: Critical factors in planning and implementing curricular innovation at institutional level**

Representatives from Belgium-FI, Bulgaria and Iceland presented some of the problems being faced in these countries at institutional level with regard to curricular reforms. The presentations were based on the national reports included in the following section of this report.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

### **Sixth session: Summary and general debate**

The session started with an interpretative summary presented by the consultants followed by a motivating discussion among the participants. The main points of the day summary were as follows:

- On the first day, the Quality Reform was presented at a general level. On the second day, the objective was to analyse the implementation of the reform in a specific institution, in this case in the UiO.
- The first remark was that it is too early to assess the reform and any conclusions should be considered as provisional and in need of further confirmation.
- One of the advantages of the QR is that it is a comprehensive reform. This is a great advantage because all the parts of the reform reinforce each other. Nevertheless, from the point of view of implementation, this comprehensiveness adds a lot of additional difficulties. The rector of the UiO expressed this idea in a very graphic way: “they were building the boat and rowing at the same time”. This has represented an extra workload for managers and for academic and non-academic staff over the last three years.
- Reform of the UiO was possible thanks to the commitment of the rector and his governing team which was elected three years ago. The governance model and the leadership of the university have been decisive in implementing the reform. A different result in the election of the rector would perhaps have resulted in less active implementation.
- It is still too early to evaluate the results of curricula reform, but there is concern over the possibility of only introducing structural reforms and not implementing the real pedagogical changes needed to prepare students for the demands of society.
- Real changes have been made to the organisational models, especially with regard to the closer follow-up of students, changes in the examination procedures, a more international and multidisciplinary approach and so on. Nevertheless, some students believe that these changes are not consistent enough.
- Student guidance, an important tool in the new pedagogical process, still appears to be insufficient.
- In spite of the importance given to skills in the curricular reform, knowledge is still the backbone of the learning process. New methods are being implemented but the old ones still remain. Teachers need to change their mentality and, in all probability, this change requires more time and effort than expected.
- One of the consequences of implementing the reform was the apparent increase in the workload of teachers. Whether this is going to be a permanent situation or is just a transitional situation is not clear. The consequences on the working conditions of academic staff and on their commitment to research should be carefully considered as a crucial aspect for the success of the reform.

- In spite of the stated objective of involving stakeholders in the QR process, the reality at institutional level shows a highly internally-oriented reform with insufficient participation of external stakeholders.
- In short, efforts towards implementing the reform at institutional level have been considerable and deserve congratulations. Many aspects are still being adjusted and will probably need time to work properly, but nobody should expect that such deep changes can be introduced gently in a very short period of time. Changes at pedagogical level need time and continuous reflection. In this sense, everything indicates that the UiO is on the right track despite some temporary pitfalls.

### **Wednesday 11 October**

#### **First session: What measures promote the employability of graduates?**

Representative of the Career Service at UiO and the Project Manager of the Employability Project at the Faculty of Humanities presented results about the employability of graduates and about the studies they are carrying out to analyse the skills required by the labour market.

The presentation was followed by a discussion.

#### **Second session: Panel discussion with stakeholders**

Representatives of business associations, teachers unions and students associations reflected on the implementation of the QR. All of them voiced their support for the QR but at the same time were critical of the real changes produced by the reform.

#### **Third session: General debate in cluster and summary**

The objectives of this final session were twofold. Firstly, it was designed to summarise and discuss what the group had learned throughout the day and secondly, make a general reflection on the whole PLA.

The session started with an interpretative summary presented by the consultants. The main points of the day summary were as follows:

- The economic situation of Norway, with full employment of graduates, is a great advantage, but it could, at the same time, be a problem because this situation may reduce the degree of competition needed to improve the quality of the human resources.
- In these first stages of the reform, links with the external world, especially with employers, have been the weakest part of the reform. They have not played an active role in the design of new study programmes and employability does not yet appear to be a central issue in the implementation of the reform.
- It is still unclear at this stage of the reform whether the change is merely structural or if it represents a real pedagogical transformation, a new model of learning where students are being trained for new economic and social requirements. Stakeholders, including students, answer in the negative, but perhaps it is soon to answer.
- The increased workload on teachers is one of the problems raised again and it seems to be a crucial factor for the success of the reform.

- Finally, the social and labour relevance of the new bachelor degrees is still unclear. Students expressed some doubts about the real significance of the new three-year degrees in the labour market.

After a discussion on the main issues learned during the day, participants expressed their satisfaction with regard to the development and results of the PLA. All the participants considered the content and organisation to be excellent. The representative of the European Commission thanked the Ministry of Education and Research for the excellent organisation and the open and frank presentation of the Quality Reform, not only with regard to the positive aspects, which represented the majority, but also with regard to those aspects which still require further work in the future.

### **3 Lessons learned and recommendations**

The key issues learned from the Peer Learning Activity focus on six broad, interrelated areas: 1) comprehensive reform, 2) implementing curricular reform, 3) governance, autonomy and stakeholders' involvement, 4) incentives and funding, 5) accreditation and 6) relevance of new degrees.

#### **3.1 Comprehensive reform**

- The Bologna process has been a great opportunity for the majority of countries to initiate and reflect on curricular reform.
- In order to successful reform higher education systems, a comprehensive approach is needed. This will differ according to the history and culture of the national system.
- Reforms need to be made by consensus between governments, HEIs, students and other stakeholders. Reforms have to be understood, accepted and linked to incentives.
- Reforms within the Lisbon Strategy and Bologna process involve developing the international networking of governments and HEIs into a continuous process.
- Part of the reform should include a clear redefinition of relations and expectations. These involve the relations between the state and HEIs and between all individuals involved at institutional level (teachers, researchers, students).

#### **3.2 Implementing Curricular Reform**

- It is important to promote an environment which motivates both teachers and students.
- Communication is an important element to encourage curricular reforms and inspire the more reluctant sectors (e.g. inspiration week at University of Oslo).
- The workload on academic staff should be taken into consideration (effects of modularisation, of changing methodologies and student assessment procedures). It should be determined whether curricular reforms imply temporary or permanent workloads on academics in order to adjust teaching and research duties.
- There is a danger of concentrating too much effort on structural changes and forgetting the main goal of curricular reforms: increasing innovation, quality and the effectiveness of HE.
- Curricular reforms should take into account the future format of the student experience: learning resource centres, IT-based, feedback to and from students, very robust arrangements for guidance, information and support for students.
- Students are motivated to learn when they perceive the quality of training programmes and the relevance of the programmes for the labour market. Institutions and teachers should be able to motivate students to learn more, to be well-prepared and to be entrepreneurial citizens.

### **3.3 Governance, autonomy and stakeholders' involvement**

- For successful reforms, the degree of institutional autonomy should be increased and accompanied by robust governance arrangements with skilled leaders.
- Strong institutional leadership and commitment are key aspects for a successful reform.
- HEIs must be accountable and responsible within a more autonomous and managerial driven context.
- Clear strategy at national and institutional level is needed as a result of consulting external and internal stakeholders.
- Accountability and responsibility of individual members of academic communities of HEIs is needed to perform curricular reforms.
- Students and employers should be involved in the process of reform. The student experience should be considered as central: this includes the changing employment market as it is crucial to understand the purpose of HE from the student perspective.
- HEIs need good management information and specific success criteria when making reforms (e.g. Number of students required to be able to manage institutions properly and evaluate impact of reforms nationally, % of reduction in drop-outs considered to be a success)
- Curricular reform should be continuously monitored and this information should be fed back into the system.

### **3.4 Incentives and funding**

- A comprehensive system of funding for HEIs is of crucial importance. Under-funded HEIs cannot implement successful reforms. More and more diversified funding is needed in order to implement successful reforms.
- Incentives are key elements in reinforcing changes. Changes are easier to implement when linked directly to funding incentives.
- Incentives are helpful in reaching the targets they are aimed at, but one should always be aware of (unwanted) side-effects that also result from (one-dimensional) incentives. An incentive focusing on one issue might lead to a loss of focus on other important issues.
- A comprehensive approach to incentives via performance-based contracts needs to be considered as a means of avoiding the side-effects of one-dimensional incentives.
- Performance indicators can be used by governments as an input for funding HEIs. Key performance indicators must be output-oriented and they should be related to the different missions and strategic goals of each HEI.
- The student support system could be a tool for developing incentives for increasing retention and reducing drop-out rates. A combination of conditions for grants and loans might be an initial approach to introduce this incentive within higher education systems to make them more effective. Incentives should also be aimed at HEIs to stimulate proper guidance and referral to other studies when a student has made a wrong choice.

### 3.5 Accreditation

- Accreditation has many different meanings and purposes: Accreditation could be a way of regulating entrance into the HE system or also be part of continuous QA procedures.
- Care should be taken to ensure that too rigid accreditation does not diminish curricular innovation.
- Every country should make it clear what the objective of accreditation is and how a balance between autonomy and quality can be achieved.

### 3.6 Relevance of new degrees

- Curricula and their implementation should reflect the needs of the labour market. HEIs have to make special efforts to ensure that this is the case.
- Curricula should be defined in terms of learning outcomes. Student assessment should move from measuring final results to measuring continuous learning outcomes and development in accordance with new methodologies and expected outcomes.
- Efforts should be made to engage employers' cooperation in the development of new curricula and to improve relevance to the labour market. Cooperation is a key to achieving innovation.
- HEIs should further analyse the role and status of Bachelor degrees in the labour market.
- Joint educational projects should be encouraged for all three cycles among HEIs throughout Europe.

### 3.7 Final remarks

The six key issues agreed on and dealt with during the Peer Learning Activity very much coincide with the Commission's recommendations on the Communication "*Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation*".

- The importance of **comprehensive reform** is addressed in the first key message *Break down the barriers around universities in Europe*. This message emphasises the relevance of a core reform focused on comparable qualifications, flexible and modernised curricula adjusted to the needs of the labour market, and trustworthy quality assurance systems. Accreditation should be analysed in each country in order to achieve a balance between autonomy and quality.
- The relevance of **governance, autonomy and stakeholders' involvement** is stressed in the messages about *ensuring real autonomy and accountability for universities*. The need to give HEIs real autonomy and accountability and, as a consequence, the need to encourage new internal governance systems based on strategic priorities has been stressed and agreed on during the PLA.
- In relation to **incentives and funding**, the PLA agrees with the Communication on the relevance of providing incentives to HEIs for structured partnerships with the business community. The PLA stresses the need to make the necessary organisational changes and build up entrepreneurial attitudes and management skills.

- The **relevance of new degrees** has been thoroughly discussed and agreement has been reached during the PLA. With regard to the message on *providing the right mix of skills and competencies for the labour market*, the PLA considers as a key element in curricular reforms that university programmes should be structured to directly enhance the employability of graduates. In addition, much needs to be learned on dealing more directly with the challenges and opportunities presented by the lifelong learning agenda. Further PLAs could be of assistance in this respect.
- Finally, throughout the PLA one learning outcome proved to be central: **the need to reinforce the dialogue with all stakeholders.**

## Annex 1. List of participants

| Country             | Priv/Gov | Title | Surname       | Name       | Organisation  |
|---------------------|----------|-------|---------------|------------|---|
| BE(FL)              | Gov      | Ms    | DE KOCK       | Linda      | Deputy director, Higher Education Policy Division, Department of Education and Training                                   |
| BE(FL)              | Priv     | Mrs   | HENDRICKX     | Veerle     | Policy adviser, Plantijn Hogeschool, Antwerp  |
| BG                  | Gov      | Ms    | DANEVA        | Mimi       | Senior expert at Directorate of Policy in Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Science                             |
| BG                  | Priv     | Mr    | YORDANOV      | Ivan       | Head of International Relations Dept., Technical University of Varna  |
| CZ                  | Priv     | Mr    | KOUBEK        | Josef      | Institute of Chemical Technology in Prague (former rector and vice-rector, member of the Bologna Promoters Team).         |
| ES                  | Priv     | Mr    | BERNABEU      | Guillermo  | University of Alicante  |
| IS                  | Gov      | Mrs   | GUNNARSDÓTTIR | Rósa       | Ministry of Education, Science & Culture  |
| IS                  | Priv     | Mrs   | GEIRSDÓTTIR   | Guðrún     | Assistant professor at the University of Iceland  |
| SI                  | Gov      | Mrs   | MARJETIC      | Eva        | Undersecretary, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Sector for Higher Education                         |
| SI                  | Priv     | Mr    | KAVSEK        | Branko     | University of Primorska, professor at Faculty of Education and a member of the university committee for quality assurance |
| SK                  | Priv     | Mr    | POKRIVCAK     | Anton      | Vice-rector for Education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra  |
| UK                  | Gov      | Ms    | DALE          | Linda      | Deputy Director of HE Teaching Quality and Widening Participation, Department for Education and Skills                    |
| UK                  | Priv     | Mr    | EVEREST       | Kelvin     | Pro-Vice-Chancellor<br>The University of Liverpool  |
| Consultant          |          | Mr    | MORA          | Jose-Gines | Technical University of Valencia, (CEGES)   |
| Consultant          |          | Ms    | VIEIRA        | Maria-Jose | University of Leon and CEGES  |
| European Commission |          | Mr    | RIENKS        | Jurgen     | Unit A2, School Education and higher Education. DG EAC  |

## **Annex 2. Agenda**

### **Sunday 8 October**

2100 Informal meeting at the hotel. Short introduction to the PLA in Oslo. Practical information.

### **Monday 9 October**

0930 **Welcome**

Toril Johansson, Director General, Ministry of Education and Research

0935-0950 **The pre-reform setting of Norwegian higher education: strengths and challenges**

Toril Johansson, Director General, Ministry of Education and Research

0950-1030: **Planning a comprehensive reform: objectives and processes**

Rolf Larsen, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Education and Research

Questions and answers

1100-1200: **Critical factors in planning and implementing reforms at policy level**

Presentations by PLA-participants: Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. Discussion

1330-1400: **What governance and monitoring tools are needed to show the performance of the system?**

Bjørn Stensaker, Programme Director, NIFU STEP Studies in Innovation, Research and Education. Question and answer session.

1400-1445 **Measuring the performance of curricular reform**

Presentations by PLA-participants: Czech Republic and United Kingdom. Discussion

1515-1700: **Summary and general debate**

EU Consultant/EU Commission

### **Tuesday 10 October**

0930-0940 **Welcome – brief introduction of University of Oslo**

Inga Bostad, Professor and Vice-Rector for Education

0940-1045: **Public policy and institutional responses: Planning and implementing curricular innovation**

Annik Myhre, Sub-Dean for Education, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences

Professor Kirsten Hofgaard Lycke, Faculty of Education

Torstein Lindstad, PhD student, former Head of the university Student Parliament

Discussion

1100-1200: **Dialogue-based and consensus-oriented public policy – rhetoric or reality? Panel discussion.**

Annik Myhre and Torstein Lindstad as above, and Associate Professor Berit Karseth, Faculty of Education

1200-1300 **Site visit** at the University Library, Georg Sverdrups Hus and the Sophus Bugges Hus Learning Centre. By Senior Adviser Eirin Haugen

1400-1500: **How does the system perform?**

Per Olaf Aamodt, Special Advisor, NIFU STEP Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, member of the group of researchers evaluating the Norwegian Quality Reform. Question and answer session.

1530-1615: **Critical factors in planning and implementing curricular innovation at institutional level**

Presentations by PLA-participants: Belgium FL, Bulgaria and Iceland. Discussion.

1615-1700: **General debate in cluster. Summary**

EU Consultant/EU Commission

**Wednesday 11 October:**

0930-1030: **What measures promote the employability of graduates?**

Hilde Doksrød, Project Manager, Project Employability, Faculty of Humanities

Frode Nyhamn, Assistant Head, UiO Career Services

Question and answer session. Discussion

1100-1230: **Panel discussion with stakeholders**

Panel members:

Carla Botten-Verboven, Director, The Federation of Norwegian Industries

Susanne Skjørberg, The National Union of Students in Norway,

Mikael Strand, The Norwegian Association of Students

Kari Kjenndalen, Secretary General, The Norwegian Association of Researchers

1400-1630: **General debate in cluster. Summary**

EU Consultant/EU Commission

### Annex 3. Summary of national reports

As preparation for the participation in the PLA, all participating countries produced a national report on Planning and Implementing Curricular Innovation: Structure, Content and Incentives. Below is a summary of the nine national reports, focusing on the general trends and conclusions. This information was provided to the participants before the PLA.

#### 1. National Policy developments and incentives

This section focuses on the influence of state policies on the introduction of the three-cycle structure, approach and incentives in the process, the development of a national qualification framework and factors promoting curricular innovation at national, institutional or programme level.

**How have state policies regulated or influenced the introduction of the three-cycle structure? What was the approach? (dialogue-based, consensus-oriented, planned and comprehensive, etc)? What were the incentives?**

With the exception of the UK, where the three cycle structure has historically been the norm and has not significantly driven changes to the HE curriculum in recent years, state policies have regulated or included the introduction of the three-cycle structure in all countries:

- *In some countries, the introduction of the three-cycle structure took place prior to the Bologna Declaration.* In *Iceland*, the degree structure previously comprised mainly two-cycle and doctoral studies. The Framework laws since 1997 have addressed the degree structure and new laws from 2006 have fully implemented the three-cycle structure. Also in *Bulgaria*, the three-cycle structure was first introduced under the 1995 Act and, after the Bologna declaration in 1999 and the Berlin conference in 2004, the Higher Education Act was duly amended with regard to access to doctoral studies. Finally, in the *Czech Republic*, the principles of the Bologna Process were included in the 1998 Act on Higher Education Institutions which came into force on 1 July 1998 and the amendment to this act came into operation on 1 July 2001.
- *In other countries, state policies changed as an immediate consequence of the Bologna declaration and the three-cycle structure is already in place.* In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, the reform outlined in the Decree on the structure of higher education (2003) was actually implemented in Flemish higher education institutions as from the academic year 2004-2005 and the new structure will gradually replace the older one. Also in *Slovenia*, in June 2004 the new structure of higher education studies was introduced with the amendment to the Higher Education Act. The first new programmes started in the academic year 2005/06 and will gradually replace the existing 'pre-reform' ones. In *Slovakia*, the introduction of the three-cycle structure was initiated by the state through the Act on Higher Education no. 131/2002
- *In other countries the three-cycle structure has yet to be implemented.* In *Spain*, the 2001 Act on Universities stated the main arrangements linked to the Bologna process. In 2004, there was a change in the government and reform of the existing Act on Universities was started. Consequently, changes to the regulation of graduate studies will be made in the coming months. From now on, general guidelines will be provided and official first degrees will start to be implemented not before the 2007-08 academic year. In contrast to first degrees, in the 2006-07 academic year an important number of postgraduate programmes (Masters and Doctorates) will be implemented.

In most countries, the approach towards implementing reform was based on dialogue between the higher education sector (university community, public in general) and the Ministry of Education (IS, CZ, SK, SI, BE-FL, BG and Spain are now in the midst of this process). On the other hand, in the UK *the degree of change driven by Bologna varies from institution to institution, with many Institutions making no significant adjustment, and those where debate is liveliest usually driven by committed individuals. There has been dialogue, consensus-oriented in principle but not so far involving any serious pressure for change. But Bologna is increasingly known about and worried over, albeit by a small proportion of staff.*

- *Some countries report dialogue with different stakeholders (employers, students, etc.). In the Czech Republic, Parliament, the Ministry of Education and the Accreditation Commission invited universities and representatives of newly established Colleges (later called non-university HEIs) to a dialogue on the implementation of the Bologna principles and detailed discussions were also organised with companies of various sizes as well as the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs. Currently, the individual universities and their faculties are still discussing specific issues concerning the curricula content with the corresponding employers of their graduates. In the Flemish community of Belgium, where there is a tradition for dialogue with chancellors and vice-chancellors, the two Rectors' Conferences (Flemish Interuniversity Council and Flemish Hogeschool Council) and the Flemish Students Association have played an important role in this process.*

As far as incentives are concerned, in some countries the idea of taking part in the European Higher Education Area was an incentive itself. For example, in the *Czech Republic*, in the first period of discussions the main incentive was *to make the Czech higher education system a Europe-compatible system*. In addition, the report from *Iceland* stated: *...which leads us to the main incentive for the implementation of the national policy, the consensus that as a nation we had to adhere to the mainstream changes in higher education in the world, to ensure the competencies of our nationals would be recognised in a wider context.*

### **To what extent have state policies influenced the adjustment of curricula? How successful were the incentives?**

The main influences on the adjustment of curricula are (1) state regulation (the integration of the three cycle structure and the expected learning outcomes in the law) and (2) the accreditation of the study programmes.

1. *State regulation: the integration of the three cycle structure and the expected learning outcomes in the law.* This is the case of Bulgaria and the Flemish community of Belgium. In *Bulgaria*, regulation on the state requirements for the acquisition of higher education “Bachelor”, “Master”, and “Specialist in...” degrees and on regulated professions includes related learning outcomes. Distance study programmes at higher education institutions, including the requests of people with special educational needs, and doctoral studies have also been regulated. In addition, in the *Flemish community of Belgium*, the introduction of more flexible learning paths (Decree on flexible learning in higher education, 2004) is considered to be another factor influencing the adjustment of curricula.

2. *The accreditation of the study programmes.* This is the case of Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In *Slovenia*, most HEIs started with curriculum reform after the Council for Higher Education adopted the *Criteria for accreditation of HEIs and study programmes* in September 2004 and the *Criteria for ECTS evaluation of study programmes* in November 2004. In *Iceland*, the main influence of state policies on the adjustment of curricula was the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework of Iceland and the link between that and the accreditation processes regulated in 2006 by fields of study. Also in the *Czech Republic* the main influence was exercised by the

Accreditation Commission since old-based and newly created curricula were re-accredited.

3. *Both factors: State regulation and accreditation.* In the Slovak Republic and in Spain, state regulation and accreditation have or will have an influence on the adjustment of curricula. In *Slovakia*, apart from detailed regulation and additional documentation on curricular reform (The National Programme of Education and Training in SK for the Next 15-20 years, Concept of the Further Development of Higher Education in Slovakia for the 21st Century, Act on Higher Education No. 131/2002 amended by Act No. 5/2005 in relation to the awarding of scientific-pedagogical degrees and recognition of professional qualifications), state policies have had an impact on the adjustment of the curricula through the study programme accreditation process. All study programmes must be in accordance with the recommended content of study fields as approved by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic – upon the proposal of the academic community. The body in charge of accrediting the study programmes is the Accreditation Commission which is, in fact, an advisory body of the Government of the Slovak Republic. Also in *Spain*, although the reform of the Act on Universities increased the freedom of universities to design programmes by eliminating the catalogue of official university programmes and introducing a register of programmes, the government will set general guidelines (including learning outcomes) for undergraduate programmes considering broad areas of knowledge. Strict requirements will be set to determine inclusion in this Register. The quality of the programme (objectives, organisation, resources, outcomes and internal quality assurance system) will be reviewed before a programme can be registered. This *ex-ante* accreditation will be followed by *ex-post* accreditation when first graduates finish the programme.

4. *Curricula not influenced by state policies.* In the UK, given the absence of any requirement for change, curricula have seen no significant adjustment. However, the Government has supported curriculum innovation and more widespread innovation in Teaching and Learning through a number of targeted initiatives over the last few years. The 2003 Higher Education White Paper recognised the high level of quality in teaching and learning in HE and encouraged HE to focus further on enhancing this quality by rewarding and sharing excellent practice. The key Teaching and Learning initiatives which will bring innovation and enhancement to curricula are: the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning; the Higher Education Academy and the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. In addition to these, the Government's emphasis on encouraging HEIs to engage more with employers has led to significant developments in curriculum design particularly through the development of Foundation Degrees.

As far as incentives are concerned, in the *Czech Republic* individual universities set incentives for their staff in this restructuring process. In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, a state policy to stimulate innovation in 'hogescholen' and universities by granting the institutions a special budget has been introduced and in *Spain*, most regional governments have established competitive programmes for financing pedagogical initiative in order to develop the new programmes, define competences, and so on. In addition, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation issued the first Public Announcement of grants for the design of degrees adapted to the European Higher Education Area. The main outcome of each project, developed by university networks, has been a White Paper on first degrees in which curricula have been analysed and designed considering: the European qualification framework, the graduate labour market, occupational profiles, generic and subject-specific competences, assessment of competences by professional associations, design of the degree structure, objectives, contents, ECTS allocation and quality criteria.

### **Has a national qualifications framework been developed, following the European qualifications framework?**

Countries have either developed a national qualifications framework following the EQF (BE-FL, IS, BG UK) or are in the process of developing one (CZ, SI, ES).

The *Flemish Community of Belgium* has developed a national qualifications framework integrating the EQF in the Decree on the structure of higher education (2003) as minimum requirements for bachelor and master degrees (general competencies and general job-related competencies). The same applies to *Iceland*. In *Bulgaria*, although the degree structure is developed according to the levels of the EQF, legislation has not yet solved the problem of the degree “Specialist in ...” in the context of the Bologna reforms. A new Higher Education Development Strategy is to be adopted by the National Assembly by the end 2006 to optimise the structure.

In the *United Kingdom*, most institutions (with the exception of a handful of elite providers) design, monitor and review all of their taught provision with reference to a credit system which maps to ECTS. There are also frameworks to integrate the HE levels with lower levels in the education system, and with other types of provision, e.g. vocational. Significant changes to the portfolio of educational awards and pathways in the UK are currently in very active development.

Other countries are in the process of developing their national qualifications framework in accordance with the EQF. The *Czech Republic* is starting to develop its national qualifications framework. In *Slovenia*, a national qualifications framework is being developed with the European qualification framework in mind and *Spain* has already started a discussion process on the introduction of a NQF compatible with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

### **What factors are promoting curricular innovation at national, institutional or programme level?**

Some factors promoting curricular innovation are associated with state policies and, hence, are similar to factors in question b, that is, state regulation and accreditation (BE-FL, CZ, SK). Specific budget and grant programmes for curricular innovation are also included (BE-FL, ES).

Two other important factors which promote curricular innovation are the labour market (SK) and the links between higher education, research and the business sector (BG, IS). In *Bulgaria*, closer links between HEIs, research and business institutions, established by career centres and high-technological business incubators in the HEIs in recent years, are a precondition for introducing innovations to curricula. At national level in *Iceland*, the Science and Technology Policy Council publishes the Science and Technology Policy for Iceland every three years.

In *Iceland*, there is total autonomy for curricular reforms at institutional and programme level. It is the role of the government to accredit new fields of study and maintain external quality assurance. With a similar purpose, increased autonomy at institutional level is being encouraged in *Spain* in the reform of the Act on Universities.

In *Bulgaria*, curricular reform within the Bologna Process has had a positive influence on Bulgarian HEIs. Innovations in curricula have been encouraged by establishing joint degree programmes with foreign HEIs (Joint degree programmes are established in 8 HEIs so far, mostly in technical sciences, European Studies, International Relations and Economics)

In the *United Kingdom*, it is not Bologna, but rather the UK Government’s ‘Widening Participation’ agenda which is the main driver for change. *This agenda is directly linked to funding, with a ‘top slice’ of system-wide funds for teaching being redistributed on the basis of proportion of students from non-participating higher education backgrounds. The Access*

*Agreement stipulates what activity, funded from a proportion of the new fee income, is planned to maintain and improve the proportion of students from poorer backgrounds. Such activity is very diverse and large-scale in the sector, and focuses on raising awareness, aspiration, and achievement in non-participating groups so as to improve the likelihood and possibility of participation.*

## **2. Institutional response to curricular reform**

This section focuses on institutional acceptance of policies regarding curricular reform (by academics, administrators, students), institutional autonomy to make curricular changes and related incentives, the consideration of the Bologna process as an opportunity for change, and factors inhibiting curricular innovation at national, institutional or programme level.

### **How have policies regarding curricular reform been accepted by institutions in general, academics, administrators and students?**

In general, policies regarding curricular reform have been accepted quite well at institutional level. The reason for this positive reaction has been, in most cases, the previous process of debate between government and institutions (BE-FL, CZ) and the increase in institutional autonomy regarding curricular design (BE f). There have been some restraints with regard to, for example, reductions in the length of studies (SI).

- In *Bulgaria*, curricular reform within the Bologna Process has been accepted positively by HEIs since innovations in curricula have been encouraged as a result (joint degrees, new methodologies, more flexibility, etc).
- In the *Czech Republic*, the policies regarding curricular reform have been first accepted by administrators (rectors and deans) who played a crucial role in persuading the staff of the advantages of and the need for this process. Certain faculties of universities, and also technical universities, reacted negatively and gave reasons for this negative reaction (difficulties involved in the division of studies, disadvantages of the first two step division etc.). Students accepted it calmly.
- In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, institutions have accepted the policies regarding curricular reform quite well as a consequence of the time devoted to preparatory debate between the government and the institutions and the fact that the institutions have a lot of autonomy to develop their own curricula as long as they respect the law.
- In *Iceland*, curricular reform has been received well in all HEI's with the sole exception of Medicine.
- In the *Slovak Republic*, there has been widespread support from all relevant stakeholders (employers, managers, members of the Accreditation Commission, members of administration boards of public HEIs, members of the Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for Education, and the employees of the Ministry of Education concerned).
- In *Slovenia*, the introduction of the Bologna reform was well accepted by students, who were very enthusiastic about the introduction of the ECTS, the evaluation of study programmes, shortening the length of studies, the emphasis given to employability and increased possibilities for student mobility. On the other hand, curricular reform was accepted with mixed emotions in higher education institutions. There was a positive response to the possibility of increasing international cooperation (joint degrees, student

and teacher mobility), while there was a certain degree of reluctance to shorten the length of studies (especially the first and second cycle) at the expense of the quality of knowledge acquired by graduates.

- In *Spain*, the reform planned by the new government team which gives full autonomy to universities to design the programmes represents a tremendous historical change. In this sense, there is great expectation among HEIs as to how the process will evolve.

As mentioned previously, in the *United Kingdom*, it is not Bologna but rather the UK Government's 'Widening Participation' agenda which is widely accepted and indeed embedded in all Institutions, and widely understood and accepted by staff of all categories. There has been widespread, sustained public discussion of this policy, and there have been a series of government initiatives to address the deep-rooted and long-term factors which prevent the participation of certain socio-economic groups.

**What level of autonomy do institutions have to make curricular changes? What kind of incentives have institutions put in place internally? How successful have they been?**

In general, autonomy has been increased in recent years so most countries have total autonomy to provide educational programmes according to their institutional potential and social needs provided that they comply with general quality standards and accreditation procedures. However, there are important differences between countries. Whereas in the United Kingdom, the autonomy of HEIs is long established, in some countries autonomy has recently been increased.

- In *Bulgaria*, HEIs are free to provide various training programmes in accordance with the Higher Education Act, with state requirements for the acquisition of higher education at Bachelor, Master and "Specialist in.." level, and with state requirements for the acquisition of higher education in regulated professions. No other compulsory restrictions have been set at national level. In terms of academic self-government, HEIs have the right to independently conclude contracts with the state or with other users for basic and applied research, as well as for upgrading the qualifications of higher education specialists, and the right to associate with higher schools and other organisations while performing educational and research activities. Bulgarian HEIs also have the right to provide joint degree programmes with foreign HEIs, accredited both by the NEAA and the corresponding foreign accreditation bodies.
- In the *Czech Republic*, the level of institutional autonomy to make curricular changes is high but limited by (rigid) accreditation.
- In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, since the Decree on Universities (1991) and the Decree on Hogescholen (1995), HEIs have been granted a large degree of autonomy. Lump sum financing was introduced and control of the budget switched from an ex-ante to an ex-post perspective. HE institutions can make their own decisions with regard to staff appointments and decide on seniority levels based on prior professional experience (e.g. obtained abroad). They independently design the curricula (there is no "national curriculum") provided that they comply with the general quality standards. Under certain circumstances (monitored by the Accreditation Agency) they may be allowed to establish new study programmes.
- In *Iceland*, HEIs have total autonomy for curricular change and innovation.
- In *Slovakia*, under the Act on Higher Education, HEIs are fully competent to create study programmes. However, in order to carry out a particular study programme, a HEI must submit it to the Accreditation Commission for approval. The Accreditation Commission compares the content of the study programme with the content of a more general study

field as set by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. Once the programme has been accredited, the HEI has full authority to offer the study programme to students.

- In *Slovenia*, HEIs have full autonomy to develop the new curriculum within the framework of the higher education structure set by the Higher Education Act. Additionally, they must prepare the study programmes in accordance with the *Criteria for accreditation of HEIs and study programmes* to get the expert approval of the Council for Higher Education. That is the condition for new study programmes to become state approved.
- In *Spain*, the reform planned by the new government team gives full autonomy to universities to design the programmes. The government will establish a National Register of diplomas. Strict requirements will be established in order to be included in this Register. This ex-ante accreditation will be followed by an ex-post accreditation when first graduates finish the programme.
- In the *United Kingdom*, British Universities are autonomous charitable entities, with their own governance arrangements and complete independence to conduct their affairs. However their dependence on public funding for teaching and research means that, in fact, there is close and constant dialogue between Universities and government agencies, including virtually direct control, within parameters, of student numbers, standards, quality, financial probity, and management. However, powerful and large research-intensive institutions have a relatively smaller reliance on public funding and consequently adopt a more independent attitude. In this context, Bologna does not itself figure significantly in the UK at present.

Some countries consider the openness of the new system to be an incentive which leads to more opportunities for international mobility (BG) and the introduction of grants for curricular innovations (BE-FL, ES).

#### **Are Bologna reforms considered as an opportunity to innovate curricula or just as a mandate to adjust curricula to a new structure?**

In general, Bologna has been considered as an opportunity to innovate curricula but important differences exist between institutions in the same country. Some HEIs have made a considerable effort to innovate curricula whereas others are trying to adjust existing curricula to the new structure.

- In *Bulgaria*, much importance is given to the process of transition to the EU weekly hour load for students which has increased the individual work of the students as a share of the total workload. This is a challenge for academic staff and for the new generation of students but also an important incentive for innovation and self-development (Electronic Libraries, variety of databases, wireless links, etc). Furthermore, the transition to modular curricula provides opportunities for flexibility, mobility and compatibility with in-country and foreign HEIs. Introducing curricular innovations is promoted by individual projects funded by the VI and now by the VII Frame Programme. There are as yet no specialised measures set at national level aimed at promoting curricular innovations.
- In the *Czech Republic*, Bologna reforms were naturally considered an opportunity to innovate curricula and absolutely not just a mandate to adjust curricula to a new structure, though it was sometimes a very difficult task (the load and content of individual curricula as well as linking the curricula to the first, BA, and the second, MA, steps).

- In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, innovation varies between institutions. In general, the Bologna reform has had a considerable impact on curricula considering the combination of two factors: the reform of the law on higher education and the introduction of programme accreditation.
- In *Iceland*, there has been varied response to the Bologna process. Some institutions have used it as an opportunity for curricular reform, whereas others that were already finishing curricular reform due to mergers of institutions or some other reasons, simply adapted what they had to the new structure. The full extent of this is not clear at the moment but will be more evident in 2008 when the accreditation of all fields of study will be complete.
- In *Slovakia*, the Bologna process has created conditions for national and international comparison and harmonisation and encouraged the innovation of curricula.
- In *Slovenia*, HEIs accepted the Bologna reform as an opportunity to renovate the curriculum and make it attractive to students (also to foreign students) and employers. HEIs' interest in attracting students has also increased due to the introduction of lump sum financing of higher education in 2004 which is partly dependent on the number of students and graduates. Further changes are expected in this field.
- In *Spain*, it is important to highlight the fact that although governmental regulation on this reform is still in progress, most universities are already adapting existing degrees to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): introducing a student-centred approach based on the student workload, transforming old credits to the new ECTS, and introducing new methodologies. Supported by national and regional governments, 93% of Spanish universities have already launched specific plans for the implementation of the EHEA. In most of them, curricular innovation is being promoted in some courses or in specific subjects within an existing programme.
- In the *United Kingdom*, Bologna reforms are neither considered as an opportunity to innovate curricula nor as a mandate to adjust curricula. There is no urgent pressure for change.

**What factors are inhibiting curricular innovation at national, institutional or programme level?**

Most countries consider the lack of financial resources and the lack of expertise in curriculum development as the main inhibiting factors at national and institutional levels (BE-FL, IS, SK, SI).

Depending on the country, other factors are considered as curricular inhibitors:

- In the *Czech Republic*, problems arose with the risk of undesired repetition of curricula content for the first, BA, and the second, MA, steps, and fear of a reduction in the quality of Czech higher education is traditionally very high.
- In *Slovenia*, one of the important factors which slowed curricular innovation was the delay in the preparation of the new Professional and Academic Titles Act (adopted in June 2006) and the amendment to the Higher Education Act which regulates the comparison of the 'pre-reform' and 'post-reform' levels of higher education (adopted in August 2006). Another important factor was the debate on the financing of second cycle studies, which was settled with the amendment of the Higher Education Act in August 2006.

### 3. Content of curricular reform

This section focuses on the adjustment of curricula (content, methodologies, organisation, learning paths, etc) to the three-cycle structure and in terms of competencies and profile, workload, learning outcomes, labour market orientation, etc, and the changes that students have experienced as a consequence of curricular reform.

#### **In which way have curricula (content, methodologies, organisation, learning paths, etc) been adjusted to the three-cycle structure?**

Different efforts have been made in order to introduce curricular innovations, mainly content and methodologies, within the three-cycle structure. In some countries, different projects have been launched by governments and by HEIs to promote these adjustments.

- In *Bulgaria*, curricular innovations are promoted by individual projects, funded by the VI and the VII Frame Programmes. As yet, there are no specialised measures set at national level which are aimed at promoting curricular innovations. All stakeholders are involved in the process of suggesting the state requirements for programmes. An example in this field is the development of an ordinance on the state requirements for the acquisition of higher education that leads to practicing regulated professions in *Shipping and Marine Navigation*. The project will lead to the adjustment of the curricula with respect to updated desired learning outcomes for each degree, in accordance with the new requirements at European and international level. It will also lead to new curricula development, because some of the programmes currently provided by different HEIs exist both at Bachelor and Master (1 year) degree levels, as well as at Master programme level (5 years).
- In the *Czech Republic*, curricula have been adjusted to the three-cycle structure both in content (i.e. reduced at BA and, more specialised at MA level) and in methodologies at BA level.
- In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, changes have been made to the content, the learning paths (the start of a credit-system), the recognition of prior non formal and formal learning, attention to life-long-learning and attention to the diversification of the population.
- In *Iceland* and in the *United Kingdom*, the higher education system has been easily adjusted or was already adjusted to the three-cycle structure. The responsibility for curriculum development lies with academic programmes and departments rather than being centrally organised. In Iceland, however, HEIs are in the process of introducing *the Qualification Framework and Learning Outcomes* that will lead to further discussions and curriculum development within the programmes.
- In *Spain*, the main measure adopted by national and regional governments, and universities themselves, to promote the Bologna process has been the launch of pilot projects for the implementation of first degrees over the last three or four years. In approximately 65% of Spanish Universities, more than 50% of first courses are implementing curricular reform within pilot projects. Within these pilot projects, new methodologies with a more student-centred approach are being tested, student workload is being measured in the integration of ECTS and training programmes on new methodologies for teaching staff are being introduced in universities.

#### **Have curricula been reformed in terms of competencies and profile, workload, learning outcomes, labour market orientation, interdisciplinarity, etc?**

Most countries consider that curricula have been reformed in terms of competencies and considering the trends and needs of the labour market (BG, CZ, BE-FL, SI, SK, ES).

- In *Bulgaria*, there are vocational qualifications (“*Specialist in...*”) and master’s programmes which are more closely related to the labour market. Also bachelor’s programmes are targeted to give widespread opportunities on the labour market, although about 2/3 of the graduated bachelors continue in Master’s programmes.
- In the *Czech Republic*, curricula have been reformed in terms of profile, workload, learning outcomes, labour market orientation (BA level), and interdisciplinarity (MA level).
- In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, the fact that learning outcomes and general job related competencies are dealt with in the law has had considerable impact. The development of greater interdisciplinarity in the curricula is only in the initial stages.
- In *Slovenia*, the main changes in the development of new curricula have been defined with the new *Criteria for accreditation of HEIs and study programmes* of the Council for Higher Education. Special attention has been given to ensure the employability of the graduates. For example, during the preparation of study programmes, HEIs must also take into account the potential needs of the labour market for certain types of higher education knowledge.
- In *Slovakia*, it is considered very important that graduates of all levels (but especially those at Bachelor level) have received a full and varied higher education leading to employability in the labour market.
- In *Spain*, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) launched a European Convergence Programme. Among its actions, in 2003 the ANECA issued the first Public Announcement of grants for the design of degrees adapted to the European Higher Education Area. The main outcome of each project, developed by university networks, has been a White Paper on first degrees in which curricula have been analysed and designed considering: the European qualification framework, the graduate labour market, occupational profiles, generic and subject-specific competences, assessment of competences by professional associations, design of the degree structure, objectives, contents, ECTS allocation and quality criteria. These White Papers on first degrees can be considered as a starting point in the design of general (but not prescriptive) guidelines by the Ministry and in the specific design of the programmes by each university.
- Finally, in the *United Kingdom*, HEIs develop their own curricula, often working with external partners such as professional and regulatory bodies and employers, and with reference to subject benchmark standards developed by the HE sector and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). ‘Employability’ is a matter of concern at every phase of the student experience, from pre-recruitment enquiry, through admission, induction, progression, assessment, and lifelong learning. It embraces both the development of personal skills and competencies as well as discipline-specific knowledge. These generic skills and competencies are often explicit at module level (programmes are made up of modules) in terms of module learning outcomes, but sometimes they are delivered and/or assessed, for credit or not for credit, through a variety of mechanisms supplementary to the degree programme itself.

**What has changed for students? (student-centred learning, time on task, using technology, competence-based learning, etc)**

Most countries consider that curricular reform has promoted (or will promote in the case of SK or ES) a move towards competence-based learning and the use of technology (CZ, IS). However, some countries (for example, Iceland and Slovakia) consider it more difficult to introduce the notions of time on task and competence-based learning. In any case, most countries consider that these changes vary at institutional level.

In some countries, traditional methodologies have maintained their importance (in the case of the Czech Republic) or remain deeply engrained (in the case of Slovakia, where it is considered that *there is a strong “pull” of traditional methods*):

- In the *Czech Republic*, depending on the institution, there has been a move towards student-centred learning, time on task, competence-based learning although the classical way of teaching is still important.
- In Slovakia, the introduction of the ECTS system is considered positive for students since they have more freedom to organise their studies.

In *Bulgaria*, curricular reform tries to focus on competence-based learning which is relevant to the labour market. Efforts are directed towards training and building-up skills and capabilities in IT, foreign languages, human resources management, practical professional skills and others. In support of this vision, HEIs in Bulgaria have established and developed their own Career Centres for assisting students to successfully realise their professional potential (currently, career centres have been set up in 24 of the 37 state HEIs)

#### **4. Impact of curricular reforms**

This section focuses on the impact (or expected impact) of curricular reforms on access, mobility, graduation and employability. Many countries consider that it is too soon to draw conclusions on the impact of curricular reforms since they have only just been implemented (or are still to be implemented). In general, countries expect the impact of curricular reforms on access, mobility, graduation and employability to be positive.

##### **Impact of curricular reforms on access (entry rates, admission policies, etc)**

Some countries consider that access to higher education has been increased by establishing the three-cycle structure (BG and CZ):

- In *Bulgaria*, access to higher education has increased by introducing innovative forms of training and distance learning and e-learning. Introducing Master programmes after the acquisition of a Bachelor’s degree contributed to widening access for students in the context of lifelong learning. These factors contribute to improving the conditions of access to education and act as a stimulus to include more learners in these educational formats.
- In the *Czech Republic*, there are higher entry rates at Bachelor level.

In other countries (SK, SI and ES), curricular reforms are expected to give better access to higher education.

Finally, some countries consider that curricular reforms within the Bologna process do not have an impact on access and entry rates (BE-FL, IS and UK). In Iceland and in the United Kingdom, in recent decades there has been a tendency to promote access to higher education:

- In *Iceland*, over the last decade extensive work has been done to open up access for new groups of students. Distance education programmes, lifelong learning centres and university “outposts” have been established around the country to enable students from rural areas and other non-traditional students to enter higher education institutions. The establishment of graduate programmes has also required policies on admissions.
- In the *United Kingdom*, the impact of Widening Participation on entry rates from lower socio-economic groups has started to be felt, but at present it is most visible in the greatly increased and enhanced arrangements for the induction and support of such groups. In

the past two years there has been a major initiative to clarify and publish in transparent form all arrangements and practices which have a bearing on admission, driven partly by the government's social inclusion commitments (and hence widening participation) but also by UK and European legislation on issues of diversity and equality, including specific new legal obligations with regard to disability and race.

### **Impact of curricular reforms on mobility (students, academics, graduates)**

Some countries consider that mobility has been increased or supported by establishing the three-cycle structure (BG, CZ and IS):

- In *Bulgaria* the number of students participating in different mobility schemes has increased, also due to the Socrates II-Erasmus programme. In recent years, there has been a tendency to increase the mobility of teachers and post-graduate students.
- In the *Czech Republic*, the mobility of BA-MA-PhD students is naturally increasing, whereas the mobility of teaching staff is constant and relatively low.
- In *Iceland*, students have always taken advantage of the option to study abroad since the diversity of study programmes was limited in Iceland. Even now, when the diversity has increased dramatically, student and teacher mobility is on the increase. Many postgraduate study programmes insist that students spend part of their study time abroad as exchange students. There has been a strong emphasis on widening participation in mobility programmes and strengthening the recognition of credits awarded in other countries. The Bologna process has supported that effort.

In other countries (SK, SI, ES and to some extent the UK), curricular reforms are expected to increase mobility.

- In *Slovenia*, the main expectations of the Bologna reform are a significant increase in the mobility of students, teaching staff and also graduates, especially researchers, from Slovenia to other countries. There are even greater expectations with regard to stimulating mobility from other countries to Slovenia.
- In *Slovakia*, one of the main aims of the Bologna process is to improve the mobility of students and teachers from higher education institutions. At present, exchange study visits by students and teachers from Slovak higher education institutions are mostly carried out through programmes for mobility support organised by the European Commission. The introduction of ECTS is expected to bring an increase in the number of incoming as well as outgoing students.
- In *Spain*, mobility has been high on the agenda in the Spanish higher education system. Efforts have been made to increase international student and teaching staff mobility, and, to a less extent, graduate mobility. However, although these efforts have been encouraged, to a certain extent, by the creation of the European Higher Education Area, at this point in time the consequences of curricular reform on mobility are not known.
- In the *United Kingdom*, students do not, in general, take advantage of the possibility of European mobility on anything like the scale of European students into the UK. There is a massive imbalance of inward and outward mobility in the UK HE system at present and this has been the case for several years. This has not been helped by the declining popularity and availability of foreign language teaching in the UK school system. However, a national semesterised and credit-based system is obviously intended to facilitate flexible patterns of learning for UK students, and to promote integration with European systems.

On the other hand, *the Flemish community of Belgium* is the only country that considers that curricular reform will have a negative impact on mobility. BE-FL considers that *in curricula which have been reformed in terms of competencies, the possibilities for the mobility of students are diminishing.*

### **Impact of curricular reforms on graduation and employability (graduation rates, time to degree, time to employment, etc)**

Most countries consider that data on the impact of curricular reform on graduation and employability is not available or very difficult to provide (BG, BE-FL, IS, ES).

Expectations on the impact of curricular reform on graduation and employability are varied:

- In *Bulgaria*, although it is difficult to accurately summarise the situation, the results for some specialities show an improvement in graduation and employability. *This is the case of the “Navigation” speciality, which is strictly monitored through a 6 to 12 months cycle. Here we see excellent job opportunities in the maritime industry market: employment over 98%, including 40% employment of the graduates in respectable foreign maritime companies.*
- Whereas in *Bulgaria*, the introduction of the three-cycle structure is considered to shorten the time to degree, giving students the opportunity to join the labour market earlier than before, in the *Flemish Community of Belgium* it is believed that the introduction of a credit system will lengthen the time to degree.
- In the Czech Republic, employability was questioned at the very beginning as the main disadvantage, especially at BA level. This has been slightly improved and BA graduates are increasingly and successfully entering employment without continuing MA programmes. *Nevertheless, the proportion of students interested in continuing after BA level remains too high.*
- In *Iceland*, data collection on the employability of graduates has not yet been successfully implemented.
- In *Slovenia*, one of the expectations of the Bologna reform is to shorten the length of studies and to increase the rate of students who successfully complete their studies and obtain a higher education diploma relevant to the labour market
- In *Slovakia*, first level students represented more than half the total number of students in 2005. This ratio should be viewed positively in the context of the ongoing transformation of higher education. It should be noted, however, that in the near future the question of introducing the tools required to ensure the optimum proportion of first cycle graduates admitted to second level study programmes should be discussed.
- Finally, by European standards graduation rates in the *United Kingdom* are excellent, though this does vary somewhat among types of institution. Time to degree is quicker in the UK than elsewhere, but in the UK system progress to threshold standard is measured by the assessment of learning outcomes, not time elapsed. Employment figures are good and improving, but more particularly for the more research-intensive and ‘Russell Group’ Institutions. This undoubtedly owes something to the growing emphasis not just on employability issues in the curriculum, but to the use of work placements and other types of work experience, either for credits or as a supplementary activity.

## 5. Measuring the performance of curricular reform

This section focuses on the approaches used to measure performance following curricular reform, on quality assurance mechanisms and on any cost-effectiveness indicators in place.

### How is performance measured following curricular reform?

Almost all countries consider that it is too soon to measure the performance of curricular reform and recognise that performance evaluation is an important part of the higher education system. New higher education regulations within the Bologna process introduce quality assurance as a key factor in giving institutions more responsibility in curricular reform.

- The *UK* system seems to be the most experienced in measuring the performance of higher education institutions. *It is subjected to constant scrutiny, both internally as all institutions have highly-developed quality assurance and enhancement arrangements in place, and externally both through government-sponsored scrutiny, and through a comprehensive use of 'league tables' in the media, which exert real influence.*
- Also in *Bulgaria*, the internal system for assuring the quality of programmes and teaching staff has been introduced as a criterion for institutional accreditation. Internal quality assurance systems are a good example in this area and 14 out of 51 HEIs are certified by ISO9001:2000. Furthermore, a regular programme of systematic internal and external audits has been established and is *considered extremely valuable.*
- Slovenia is in the process of establishing a system of external evaluation and quality assurance in higher education. In November 2004, the first steps were taken with the adoption of the *Criteria for monitoring, assessment and assurance of quality in higher education institutions, study programmes, science and research, and in artistic and professional work* by the Quality Assessment Commission of Slovenia. The task of ensuring external evaluation of higher education will be one of the duties of the Council for Higher Education.

### What quality assurance mechanisms are in place? (national/institutional)

In all countries, quality assurance mechanisms are in place at all levels (national, institutional and programme). Accreditation has recently been adopted (or will be) in most countries since programmes in the new bachelor-master degree system have to be accredited (BG, CZ, BE-FL, IS, SK, ES, SI).

- In *Bulgaria*, the evaluation and accreditation system has undergone new development since 2004 in terms of its scope and structure. New criteria for quality evaluation, post-accreditation monitoring and control have been developed. They are adjusted to European standards and the recommendations of the ENQA. The Higher Education Act, amended in 2004, brought about a shift towards the evaluation of quality, rather than the evaluation of compliance with state requirements. Programme assessment methods have also been redirected from a programme-to-programme approach to subject level evaluation.
- In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, the main characteristics of the new accreditation system are the following: (1) Accreditation follows the bachelor-master degree system (professional oriented bachelors and academic oriented bachelors will lead to different accreditation standards and criteria), (2) publicly funded institutions cannot offer a non-accredited programme and (3) new programmes have to submit themselves to a specific kind of ex-ante accreditation procedure, organised by the accreditation organisation.
- In Czech Republic, Iceland and Slovenia, accreditation procedures for new study programmes are also established and mandatory.

- In *Spain*, the government will establish a National Register of diplomas. The quality of the programme (objectives, organisation, resources, outcomes and internal quality assurance system) will be reviewed before registering a programme. This ex-ante accreditation will be followed by an ex-post accreditation when the first graduates finish the programme.
- In *Slovakia*, the Accreditation Commission will introduce complex accreditation procedures to help transform higher education institutions into research universities.

Aside from accreditation, other quality assurance procedures are common at national and institutional level. In *Iceland*, these mechanisms are internal quality assurance, external evaluations and performance contracts (between HEIs and the government).

In the *United Kingdom*, individual universities are responsible for ensuring that appropriate academic standards are being achieved for their qualifications, referenced against national definitions. The standards of degrees awarded by HEIs are subject to independent review by the Quality Assurance Agency and external examiners. Its audits and reviews are based upon a 'peer review' process. The HE quality assurance system has been further strengthened by the development of the Teaching Quality Information website, which makes key information on quality available to the public, and incorporates feedback on courses from existing students

#### **Have cost-effectiveness indicators regarding curricular reform been designed?**

In most countries, cost-effectiveness indicators regarding curricular reform have not been introduced so far (BG, CZ, IS, SI, ES, SK, BE-FL) and, in general, countries are interested in learning more about them. In some countries, instances of individual institutions collecting corresponding data are common (CZ). Slovenia will be able to make some initial estimates on cost-effectiveness next year after the HEIs prepare their annual reports with financial statements. The most experienced country with regard to cost-effectiveness indicators is the *United Kingdom*, whose HEIs are subject to rigorous financial control and audit both internally and externally.

Although not measured, institutions in the Flemish community of Belgium have the impression that staff workloads are increasing, especially in the period when the reform takes place.

## **6. Implementing curricular reform**

#### **What lessons have been learned in your country in terms of curricular innovation that can be applied to other European countries?**

Some common elements which are considered relevant for curricular innovation can be applied to other European countries, namely: the combination of autonomy and quality assessment, funding mechanisms and joint degrees.

- In *Bulgaria*, joint degree programmes are of the highest value for the development and implementation of innovative curricula.
- In the *Czech Republic*, the following lessons have been learned: (1) curricular restructuring is now accepted and taken as a positive innovative approach in HE, (2) BA and MA levels are successfully applicable in the majority of HE branches and (3) the third step (PhD) is perfectly accepted by students as an integral part of the three-cycle system, whereas in some branches (hard sciences and engineering) the disappointment is on the side of the supervising staff and partners from practice because of the limited influence of the content of PhD theses by the partners from practice.
- In the *Flemish community of Belgium*, the combination of autonomy and quality assessment through accreditation is successful because institutions have the impression

that they are responsible for quality. On the other hand there is a growing need for money in return for more flexible paths, diversification of the student population, etc.

- In *Iceland*, the size of their higher education system is considered to limit the applicability of their experience.
- The *Slovak* experience of curricular reform so far supports the tendency towards strengthening the autonomy of HEIs in the academic field, which is in fact Slovakia's main priority nowadays.
- In *Spain*, the implementation of the Bologna process has been delayed due to several political circumstances, and collegiality remains too strong. However, there is a strong commitment on the part of governments and university leaders to implement reforms and increase the autonomy of institutions in view of the experiences of other countries. This is probably the main strength.
- Also in *Slovenia*, since the reform has not yet finished, learning from others about the implementation of curricular reform is considered necessary. Discussions are being held on the subject of the gradual implementation of new study programmes.
- In the *United Kingdom*, the following lessons are considered relevant:
  1. Securing the understanding and commitment of a significant proportion of academic and support staff.
  2. Developing strategies for delivery to think through the implications for activity at each phase of the student experience.
  3. Focusing on reality and the need for change is increased by any direct link to funding.
  4. Retaining common sense when working with employers; their understanding, priorities and timescales are very different, and in particular they do not think in terms of broad national requirements. They tend to think within horizons of time which are too short to be applied to planning the delivery of Higher Education.

