



Social work and the Bologna Process

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As social work training in Europe is characterized by progressive 'academisation' it is directly affected by the changes in university structures triggered by the Bologna Process. This means, however, simultaneously that all the ambiguities surrounding social work education, such as the level and rank it has achieved as an independent academic discipline, the relationship between theory and practice and the duality of training patterns at university and non-university institutions, are becoming more starkly apparent and need to be addressed with renewed urgency in practically all countries that have subscribed to the transformation initiative.

It will be argued in the following that the interface between the uncertainties of the Bologna Process and the uncertainties associated with the development of social work education offers singular opportunities for the definition of clearer quality criteria and hence a series of sharper professional profiles for the whole range of social professions at the same time as there are risks of a reduction of professional autonomy and critical reflection resulting in the 'instrumentalisation' of the professional activities.

It is worth summarizing the main stages and points of the Bologna Process.

The process of achieving greater compatibility between qualifications started not with the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, as is commonly assumed and is not an initiative by the EU, but has its origins in the Lisbon Declaration of 1997. This 'Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region', as its full title says¹ was the result of an initiative by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and was adopted by national representatives at a meeting in Lisbon on 8 - 11 April 1997.

The main points of this Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention are:

- Holders of qualifications issued in one country shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another country.
- Each country shall recognise qualifications - whether for access to higher education, periods of study or higher education degrees - as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.
- Recognition of a higher education qualification issued in another country shall have one or both of the following consequences:
 - a. access to further higher education studies, including relevant examinations and preparations for the doctorate, on the same conditions as candidates from the country in which recognition is sought;

¹ For the full text and a continually updated list of signatures and ratifications see <http://conventions.coe.int>; search for CETS 165.

- b. The use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the country in which recognition is sought.

In addition, recognition may facilitate access to the labour market.

- All countries shall provide information on the institutions and programmes that belong to their higher education systems.
- All countries shall appoint a national information centre, one important task of which is to offer advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons.
- All countries shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate recognition.

The Lisbon Declaration represents therefore the first step of European countries looking at the differences in their higher education systems and from this results immediately the necessity to introduce quality assessment systems which go beyond mere descriptors of contents to facilitate the evaluation of compatibility, although the introduction of a national quality assessment system is merely an option. A not unimportant factor in this development is the parallel process of the GATS negotiations globally which are aimed at liberalisation of the service sector which includes education. Marketing considerations play an ever increasing role in subsequent agreements, even though it can be argued equally that the development of European standards constitutes a defence against complete marketisation and privatisation as much as it may appear in certain respects that the process promotes liberalisation and commercialisation. Ultimately, the Convention provides only a framework of recommendations and neither UNESCO nor the Council of Europe have any power to impose sanctions.

The Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, issued before the ratification of the Lisbon Declaration in 1999 in a rather unexpected move by the education ministers of the countries France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, expressed the following objectives:

- a progressive convergence of the overall framework of degrees and cycles in an open European area for higher education
- a common degree level system for undergraduates (Bachelor's degree) and graduates (Master's and doctoral degree)
- enhancing and facilitating student and teacher mobility (the ambition being that students should spend at least one semester abroad);
- removing obstacles for mobility and improving recognition of degrees and academic qualifications

As a declaration of intention it did not immediately trigger a re-evaluation of existing structures of qualifications in the respective countries and was not taken particularly seriously, particularly since little consultation had taken place and for instance the experiences of the ERASMUS exchanges had not been taken into consideration.

The process gathered momentum with the Bologna Declaration of 1999 which encompassed a much wider range of issues and of countries now eager to sign up to this development. It links up with the objectives of the Lisbon Declaration and renders them more concrete in certain points:

- adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adopt a system with two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate), whereby access to the second cycle is dependent on the successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years.
- establish a system of credits (such as ECTS)
- promote mobility by overcoming obstacles
- promote European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- promote European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, interinstitutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

Significantly, the document² does not mention the term ‘bachelor’, although ‘master’ is being used as one of the elements that may characterise the second cycle qualification, side by side with the doctorate (‘the second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries’). This alone indicates how different interpretations were secondarily attributed to the Declaration and how complex the cross-over process of differentiation of academic traditions and the simultaneous harmonization has become as a result of the meeting of overt and hidden agendas. In addition, the underlying intention of making the university structures more flexible in terms of ‘user needs’ also becomes visible, for instance in the specification of the ECTS system where it is specified: ‘Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned’.

A further signal which at first received scant attention was given in the text with the mention of the importance of the first cycle qualification for job qualifications: ‘The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification.’

Two years later progress was evaluated and some of these points were deepened in the Prague Communiqué, signed now by ministers from 33 European countries. It

- reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of the Bologna Declaration
- appreciated the active involvement of the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB)
- took note of the constructive assistance of the European Commission
- made comments on the further process with regard to the different objectives of the Bologna Declaration
- emphasised as important elements of the European Higher Education Area:
 - lifelong learning
 - involvement of students
 - enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area to other parts of the world (including the aspect of transnational education)

It is surprising that only at this relatively late stage two important European organisations become officially involved in the process, the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), each of which were to produce their own

² http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/990719BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.PDF

position papers subsequently. By then, the underlying agenda of the Lisbon Declaration, of enhancing the competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area, has become firmly established, although the joint positioning of all European countries in a global context did not manifest automatically the intended unifying responses.

The Berlin Conference of 2003 therefore served to take further stock and set priorities for future convergence. It concentrated on demands for three intermediate priorities, i.e.³:

1. Quality assurance

Ministers stressed the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies and agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures
- International participation, co-operation and networking

2. The two-cycle system

Ministers asked for the development of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.

3. Recognition of degrees and periods of studies

Ministers underlined the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process. Every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge.

4. The third cycle

Ministers also considered it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process.

In addition the concept of lifelong learning gets reaffirmed, albeit in rather vague and general terms: 'They stress the need to improve opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the lifelong learning paths into and within higher education.' Hints are made in the direction of tying in research more closely into the process by establishing links between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area and their activities.

At the time of writing the latest evaluation by education ministers of countries participating in the process has just taken place in Bergen, Norway, and produced the following points in its declaration of 20. May 2005⁴, which are noticeably less definite and expressed more as aspirations than previous benchmark objectives:

Ministers underline their determination to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010. This is placed in the clear context of competitiveness and the overall attractiveness of Europe as a 'knowledge-based society'.

³ http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/030919Berlin_Communique.PDF

⁴ http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf

By 2007 the ministers hope to have achieved:

- the implementation of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance as proposed in the ENQA report;
- the implementation of the national frameworks for qualifications;
- the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including at the doctorate level;
- the creation of opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning.

In acknowledging the demands by the National Unions of Students in Europe cursory mention is made of the social dimension of the process in the following form: 'We therefore renew our commitment to making quality higher education equally accessible to all, and stress the need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. The social dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access.' The fact that most countries are at least considering the introduction of student fees seems to have escaped the ministers' attention.

The process can by now be seen as centring on the following main principles and objectives:

Primary goals are

- the creation of a coherent European Higher Education Area in line with the Lisbon Declaration aims to strengthen the competitiveness of Europe and to underpin economic aspirations with a 'Europe of Knowledge'.
- Standardisation of course and qualification structures.
- Hierarchisation – the creation of clear distinctions between academic levels of qualifications with regulations concerning admission to higher levels.
- Quality control – the creation of accreditation and other control mechanisms in the third level sector.
- Transparency of the status and use of qualifications in academic and practice contexts.
- Creation of a European dimension in all third level cycles through exchanges and curriculum reform.

Secondary aims are:

- Achieving a closer correspondence between academic qualifications and their use in the employment context
- Facilitating university access to all social classes
- Development of new teaching and learning methods with particular emphasis on student-centred learning
- Lifelong learning

The means identified for the achievement of these aims include:

- The creation of a higher education structure of three sequential cycles
- The closer linking of research and teaching
- ECTS as an instrument for quantifying learning components
- Diploma Supplement and Accreditation as quality indicators

Interim findings

Research conducted by Sybille Reichert and Christian Tauch on behalf of the European Universities Association in 2004, entitled Trends IV⁵, was conducted on 62 universities in 29 countries that had signed up to the Bologna Process. The report is generally up-beat and emphasises the considerable progress made in terms of adjustment to the Bologna process across Europe. Nevertheless, it also indicates a number of difficulties in the interpretation and implementation of the key concepts and intentions of the various Declarations, from which the following points can be extracted:

1. Central to the architecture of the Bologna construction of three related cycles is the attribution of distinct functions to each cycle. The lack of clarity sets in immediately with regard to the first cycle which is supposed to assume a clear and easily comprehensible function. Particularly in countries where the process brings about a reduction in length it is becoming clear that this change has qualitative implications. The report states: 'Confusion sometimes exists regarding the objectives of the first cycle degree (which many mistakenly regard as a compressed version of former long-cycle programmes) and in many cases there has not been adequate time for institutions and academics to address reforms in a comprehensive way and to benefit from the opportunities offered through restructuring the curricula.' This means that the Bologna Process has set in motion a whole series of changes the consequences of which are sometimes hard to anticipate and have certainly not been anticipated in the Declarations: 'Trends IV illustrates that, although much progress is being made, the process of moving towards a comprehensible three-cycle system throughout Europe is a highly complex cultural and social transformation that has set off a chain of developments with their own dynamics in different contexts. While changes to the length of studies can be described easily, measuring their significance and their impact requires much greater and more sophisticated analysis: for example, the acceptance of new first-cycle qualifications in society, the extent to which these new qualifications meet the needs of the labour market, and the implications of a pedagogical shift to student-centred learning'.
2. Contrary to the pressure perceived in many countries to adopt the 3 year norm and as noted above the Bologna Process does not prescribe a uniform length. It is apparent that differences in length of the first cycle are beginning to manifest themselves and that these are likely to impinge on the question of compatibility: 'HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) have the choice between three and four years for the Bachelor level, as in Germany. In most countries three-year Bachelors are the legal rule, and only few have a standard length of four years, e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Scotland and Turkey (and the non-university sector in some countries)'. It can be observed that first cycle programmes with a professional orientation gravitate towards a length of four years. This offers the opportunity of maintaining the vocational elements contained in many pre-Bologna qualifications.
3. The latter comment reveals also a further unresolved issue in relation to the first cycle which is the relationship between universities and non-university institutions of higher education. The question of whether the latter will be allowed to award a compatible first cycle degree gets resolved very differently in different countries: 'Countries with

⁵ http://www.eua.be/eua/en/policy_bologna_trends.jsp

binary systems (university/polytechnic sectors) seem to have some specific issues with regard to the Bachelor degree: for example, in the Netherlands, Latvia and Finland, a distinction is made between professional and academic Bachelor degrees.' In France, for instance, non-university third level schools are planned which can award the university degree of the 'licence' with special permission of the Ministry of Culture.

4. These difficulties at the first cycle level are augmented by uncertainties regarding the relationship between first and second level and particularly the grounds on which the differentiation between first and second cycle can be based. The basic options being explored are to distinguish the cycles either in terms of basic/generic and specialized course programmes and in terms of theory vs. practice orientation: 'But even when the structural requirements for both cycles are clear, the task of meaningfully dividing teaching contents between Bachelor and Master levels remains difficult, leaving open questions regarding how to balance general subjects vs. specialised subjects and theory vs. practical experience.' The relationship uncertainties are linked also to the duration of each cycle: 'Normally holders of a professional Bachelor are expected to enter the labour market, while the academic bachelors are more likely to continue for a Master programme. In these countries the professional Bachelor can take four years, while the academic Bachelor takes only three years.' This is further compounded by shifts in the relationship between employers and third level institutions in a more market-dominated context causing some universities to come under competitive pressure: 'Universities in countries with binary systems are sometimes worried about the competition from the polytechnic sector: Bachelor-degree holders from the polytechnics, normally with compulsory practical elements in their programme, can be more attractive to employers than Bachelor graduates from universities. Some of these universities currently draw the conclusion that their Bachelor degrees are more of a formal step, or at best a platform for re-orientation. The polytechnic-type institutions, on the other hand, are quite confident that their Bachelor graduates are competitive on the labour market'.
5. At its very basic level, the distinction assumes a status significance which could become very divisive: 'In many HEIs in countries where the two cycle structure is only now being introduced students declare themselves badly informed about the value and meaning of a Bachelor ("degree for the less able") and generally plan to continue for a Master, "to be on the safe side". Even more worrying is the subsequent observation about how professors are already beginning to exploit this status difference: 'Their professors often support and encourage this attitude' which means that they show a tendency to offer Master programmes not in response to a 'real' demand but in order to underpin their own sense of importance. 'Also teaching at Master rather than at Bachelor level sometimes seems to be perceived as much more prestigious or relevant to research interests by certain professors, resulting in difficult negotiations within faculties.' The researchers see in this a real danger of an over-supply of Master courses arising according to the motto 'a Master Programme to every professor'.
6. Master programmes have usually assumed two directions, the direction that emphasises specialisation in an area of practice and the direction of explicit research, although there is uniform pattern as yet discernible: 'No European consensus exists with regard to the question of whether Master programmes should be differentiated

systematically between more applied/professional on the one hand, and more research-oriented on the other. Institutions in several countries, including Latvia, France, Germany and the Netherlands find such a differentiation useful, while others in countries such as Austria, Belgium and Poland do not' Attention is drawn to a pattern typical of Ireland and the UK: 'Meanwhile in the UK and Ireland an important distinction is drawn between "taught" and "research" Masters, and the Turkish system provides for Masters "with thesis" or "without thesis" '.

7. Generally, it is surprising that the debate over the Bologna Process in some countries is totally dominated by the '3+2' formula which the process never intended to impose mechanically but which nevertheless generated a momentum of its own: 'Discussions on both the duration and the purpose of programmes at Bachelor level continue. The misconception that the Bologna process 'prescribes' in any way the 3+2 year structure is still widespread. 3+2 is indeed the dominant model across the European Higher Education Area'.

This in turn has a bearing on the translation of duration into ECTS which has by far not been harmonised yet: 'Duration is still an issue in some countries. The most frequent type of Master programme is a postgraduate Master, building on a Bachelor programme and requiring between 60 and 120 ECTS credits. Universities in Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden consider their 60 ECTS Masters, following a 180 ECTS Bachelor, as too short and not internationally competitive.² Universities in the UK, on the other hand, consider their one-year Master programmes (often amounting to more than 60 ECTS) as a particularly attractive element of their study offers, especially to students from outside Europe'.

8. Traditional and transitional arrangements also lead to further complications: 'Some exceptions to these reform trends can still be found. Old-style, long one-cycle programmes of 300+ ECTS credits at universities continue to exist and to be popular in some countries (e.g. Poland, Hungary) and also in some disciplines (notably medicine and engineering). In Belgium there is also a phenomenon of post-Master Master programmes that require a first Master degree to be eligible for admission. In Ireland and Scotland a few examples of a move towards five-year integrated Master programmes were also found, for example in nursing, midwifery, dentistry, medicine and in sciences and engineering while the model of a four-year 'Integrated Masters' also exists in the UK. It is difficult to see how this model in its present form could be integrated as a second cycle qualification to the overarching European higher education qualifications framework.' These observations not only testify to the strength of national educational traditions but also to the unequal interpretation of the new titles in different countries. In many cases, solutions to problems arising from the transition form the basis for new problems and inconsistencies.
9. With regard to the desired synergy effect between research and teaching the report finds little evidence of this having been put into practice. Instead, the researchers find that academic staff are so pre-occupied with the administrative implications of working the new system that they do not find the time to pursue research as they would have done in more sheltered times.

With regard to the adoption of a core demand of the Bologna Declaration, the creation of two (or three) coordinated study cycles the discrepancies manifesting themselves in the implementation can be attributed to the influence of the following factors:

1. The nature and particularly the status of the discipline concerned, with medicine generally being exempt from coming under the sway of the 3+2 pattern, while the humanities seem to be able to muster less resistance.
2. The influence of professional associations which in some countries have successfully defended their demands for qualifying levels being set at a level higher than the first cycle threshold.
3. The nature of the public employment conditions in the countries concerned which are often locked into the traditional degree structure and have not moved to take account of the different levels created by the three-cycle pattern.

The overall impression of these interim findings is pointing in two directions: On the one hand the Bologna Process has triggered a general movement towards standardisation and particularly quantification of study units which can then be translated into criteria for quality control and the more rational distinction between different study phases and the definition of conditions for their sequencing. On the other hand there is widespread resistance against formal harmonisation as this cannot do justice to the character of different disciplines and the corresponding academic traditions that had always emphasised the self-directed character of higher education and scientific research. Above all, a certain degree of mistrust prevails against political agendas behind the reform which speak of benefits to academic and professional standards while promoting a sub-text of financial cuts and greater external control over an academic world judged by many politicians as being far too autonomous.

Despite these differences the most profound change that has been at least initiated and which appears to be irreversible is the replacement of an input-orientation by an output-orientation, meaning that corresponding to the changes in general social policy benchmark criteria for achievements are being set while course contents become more flexible. Implied in this is a cultural sea-change in relation to quality definitions which are taken out of the hands of the custodians of the respective disciplines and placed in the public domain. This in turn has set in motion a process that aims at re-defining the relationship between

universities and employers,
universities and professional associations,
universities and the general public,
universities and the non-university higher education sector.

So far, the debates are being conducted predominantly from a quantitative perspective which gives rise to the suspicion of a cost-cutting agenda driving the process. But unless the actual debate over quality criteria can be conducted publicly and with the participation of all parties concerned the Bologna Process will ritualise rather than resolve deep-seated conflicts over the value of university education to society.

So far, attempts at arriving at a universal definition of quality criteria for the outcomes of each of the three cycles appear to carry little conviction. One instrument was proposed with the so-

called 'Dublin Descriptors'⁶ formulated by educational experts and delegates from the countries Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden in March 2004⁷. It contains the following suggestions:

'Bachelor's degrees are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon and supersedes their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences'

The document is similarly vague on the standards suggested for the master's level, qualified throughout with terms such as 'typically', 'often' or 'may':

'Master's degrees are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;
- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;
- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.'

These differential effects can be illustrated briefly with examples of divergent developments in particular countries that have signed up to the Bologna Process.

In terms of the distinction of three related cycles it is noteworthy that the country often upheld as paradigmatic for the BA/MA system, the United Kingdom, in fact distinguishes five higher education levels with descriptors reminiscent of the Dublin criteria⁸, viz:

⁶ <http://www.jointquality.org/content/ierland/Shared%20descriptors%20Ba%20Ma.doc>

⁷ Those who have contributed to the discussions and drafting of the shared BaMa descriptors include: Marlies Leegwater (MinOCW; Netherlands), Dirk Van Damme (Flemish Inter-universities Council), Mark Frederiks (HBO-raad; Netherlands), Josep Grifoll (Agenqua; Catalunya), Nick Harris (QAA; UK), Linda de Kock (Min. Flemish Community), Wolfgang Koerner (MKW Niedersachsen; Germany), Cees Karssen (Trailblazer Committee; Netherlands), Dorte Kristoffersen (EVA; Denmark), Tobias Lindeberg (EVA; Denmark), Bryan Maguire (NQAI; Ireland), Jose-Gines Mora (Council of Universities; Spain), Ulf Ohlund (HSV; Sweden), Seamus Puirseil (HETAC; Ireland), Hermann Reuke (ZEvA; Germany), Sverre Rustad (NNR; Norway), Gemma Reurat (Agenqua; Catalunya), Ko Scheele (Insp. Onderwijs; Netherlands), Christian Thune (EVA; Denmark), Noel Vercruyssen (Min. Flemish Community), Ton Vroeijsstijn (VSNU; Netherlands), Inge de Wolf (Insp. Onderwijs; Netherlands).

⁸ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp>

- the Certificate level, often regarded as the basis for entry into higher level qualifications, covering only basic concepts of a subject area;
- the Intermediate level, which in the UK expresses largely a vocational orientation and hence marking the ability to enter a particular field of employment, not necessarily at professional level; this level can be expressed in a variety of qualifications such as an ordinary, non-honours degree, a foundation degree or a Diploma of Higher Education or other higher diplomas, which means that the terminology applying to this level is very varied.
- the Honours level, which is associated with the ability to ‘take personal responsibility’ and ‘make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances’;
- the Masters level, which signifies studies ‘at the forefront of an academic or professional discipline’ and emphasises originality in the use of research results for problem solving. The system provides for taught courses as well as research programmes or a combination of both and Master degrees can in certain cases follow the previous level in an integrated level. The terminology may also vary and some Postgraduate or Certificates or Diplomas are also regarded as operating at this level.
- the Doctoral level joins up more easily with standards applicable in other countries although the UK system also distinguishes titles such as PhD or DPhil used for awards for original research and other that have more emphasis on a taught, discipline-based element such as EdD for Doctor of Education

France is also an example of a country that is finding its own way of combining existing qualification structures with the three-cycle pattern required under the Bologna Declaration⁹. With the title ‘baccalauréat’ firmly established as the school leaving qualification France will in future use the broad bands of ‘licence, master and doctorate’. However, there are clear signs that on pressure from the professional organisations traditional vocational degrees of the ‘Bac + 2’ type will be maintained, such as the DUT (‘diplôme universitaire de technologie’) at the level of the university and the BTS (‘brevet de technicien supérieur’) at the level of ‘higher schools with post-secondary courses’. This will necessitate transition arrangements for recognition of studies for entry into the L-M-D structure.

In addition, through new systems of accreditation the absolute distinction between the university and the non-university sector in France will be suspended allowing some ‘schools’ to award the ‘licence’ and some institutions of the ‘grandes école’ type to award the Master degree.

In most European countries the introduction of a level between first and doctoral degree in the form of a Master level opens up a range of interpretations in the meaning and structure of this addition. Usually countries provide for two strands of professional or academic orientation, with the professional orientation forming more a package with the preceding degree and the academic one being linked more immediately to the following doctoral degree. This is for instance the clear direction taken in Sweden where Master degrees may one or two years to complete. Norway also preserves the right to distinguish Master degrees carrying 120 credits and those carrying only 90 credits, which is also the case in the UK where Master courses should be of at least one year duration.

⁹ http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/00_Nat-rep-05/National_Reports-France_050125.pdf

The Bologna Process seems to offer therefore more flexibility in almost all aspects than the advocates of the process at the respective national levels appear to stipulate. Overall it has created movement and debate on issues of academic quality control and social responsibility. The trends and pressures towards harmonisation do not appear to be an immediate result of the Bologna Process as such but of the national political contexts in which it is being implemented. This realisation, gleaned from international comparisons, gives an indication as to the scope and direction of resistance and modification to be exercised both at the national level and in solidarity at international level. In terms of quality the development starkly reveals the weaknesses which traditional academic quality control systems tended to conceal rather than address and in some cases this exposed weakness is being used politically to breach the defences of academic freedom and autonomy. Great care needs to be taken therefore not to confuse issues of academic autonomy with inappropriate defence reactions against justified demands for public scrutiny and accountability. Responding to those challenges constructively is indeed a worthy academic task.

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