

## POLICY UPDATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Brussels, 4 July 2008

### Overall aim: Modernising Universities as part of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and JObs

EU member states support the need for reforms identified by the Commission in May 2006 Communication "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation". The reforms should help European higher education perform better:

- Curricular reform (Bologna): The three cycle system (bachelor-master-doctorate), competence based learning, flexible learning paths, recognition, mobility.
- Governance reform: University autonomy, strategic partnership including with enterprises, quality assurance.
- Funding reform: Diversified sources of university income better linked to performance, promoting equity, access and efficiency, including the possible role of tuition fees, grants and loans.

The Commission works with Member States and the higher education sector to help implement the modernisation agenda through what is called the Open Method of Coordination (involving dialogue among clusters of policy makers and experts, peer-learning activities, indicators, benchmarks, reports and analyses), by taking special initiatives (Quality Assurance, ECTS, EQF, EIT etc.) and by supporting the initiatives of others (pilot projects, associations, networks etc.) through the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The Commission also works to support the modernisation agenda through the implementation of the Lisbon Growth and Jobs agenda, the 7<sup>th</sup> EU Framework Programme for Research and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, as well as the Structural Funds and EIB loans.

The Commission is reflecting with the Member States on the Lisbon Strategy post 2010. The reflection will culminate in year end Communication on an education and training strategy at all levels. Current ideas are to concentrate on a few Strategic goals for education and training: lifelong learning to promote quality and efficiency, equity and citizenship, creativity and innovation.

In parallel, the reflection on Bologna post 2010 has started with a Bologna seminar in May in Gent opened the post 2010 debate. A key note speech was delivered by DG Odile Quintin. It concentrated on the three issues: qualifications for the future, attractiveness and mobility for all. Minister Vandembroucke, in his closing speech, suggested the related topics of transparency, social responsibility and responsiveness, and global attractiveness. The debate will continue at the BFUG meeting in Sarajevo and should lead to conclusions in Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve in April 2009..

### Recent developments at European level

1) European leaders at the European Summit in March invited the Commission to "to present a comprehensive assessment of future skills requirements in Europe up to 2020, taking account of technological change and ageing populations, and to propose steps to anticipate future needs". We have launched work on this assessment and would be grateful for your contributions.

2) The European Consortia for Association, an active sub-group of ENQA members, has launched a Commission supported database called Qrossroads (with a Q), which contains quality reviews by Agencies, plus a summaries called Accreditation Statements. A growing number of agencies is expected to put their reviews on this site.

3) The European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR) has been launched in March 2008. The Commission supports this stakeholders initiative, which is backed by both the Bologna Ministers and the EU (Recommendation February 2006). We expect the Register to grow, to overcome initial disagreement on registration fees, and to become a valuable source of information for stakeholders within and outside Europe.

4) The Recommendation for the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong Learning (EQF) has been adopted in April this year following the earlier adoption of framework for the European Higher Education Area in 2005. The hard work on implementing both frameworks at national level can now start. All countries aim to integrate both sets of references and to provide single frameworks for their national systems of education and training (in some countries regional frameworks will co-exist). The Commission will support the networking of national bodies responsible for the implementation and will do so in cooperation with the Council of Europe, which has a similar mandate for the higher education framework.

5) Universities now have the complex task of translating the European and notably the national references into subject specific and generic learning outcomes for their curricula and course catalogues. Some inspiration they may get from the work of the project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, with which you are all familiar. On 30 June/1 July, the Commissions, together with the UNICA network is organising a training seminar on how to write and use learning outcomes for the National Teams of Bologna Experts, which you have helped to create.

6) The Commission has decided, after consulting the LLP Committee, to re-launch the ECTS Label and the DS label for outstanding performance in recognition and transparency practice. There will be a national pre-selection and the first deadline proposed is 15 January 2009.

7) Two pilot projects on Classification and Ranking presented to the DGHE under the German Presidency are coming to an end and we are looking forward to the comments of the stakeholders and policymakers on the viability of setting up independent European classification and ranking systems in the foreseeable future.

8) This summer, the Commission (DG Research in collaboration with EUROSTAT and the Education and Culture DG) will launch a call for tender on the feasibility of a European Database on Higher Education Institutions, based on the work already undertaken by the National Statistical Offices.

9) The OECD Ministers meeting in Tokyo in January have given their green light for a feasibility study on the Assessment Higher Education learning outcomes (AHELO). This could eventually lead to a kind of 'PISA' for Higher Education. The EU can contribute to this exercise by offering its experience with learning outcomes, gained through the qualifications frameworks and the Tuning project.

10) The Commission has asked a group of High level experts to examine how we can substantially increase mobility, not only for students but also for young artists, entrepreneurs and adult learners. How can we break through the glass ceiling and make mobility more attractive? The Report will be presented in June and mobility theme will be taken further under the forthcoming French Presidency of the EU.

11) The European Investment Bank (EIB) has been carrying out lending operations with national and regional authorities to develop and support student loan schemes with a view to widening access to higher education within the EU. The Commission intends to examine with the EIB, whether it is feasible to establish one day a European Student Lending Facility, to promote, inter alia, the portability of loans which could boost opportunities for young people to study abroad.