



Bologna Seminar co-organized by the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia together with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the National Training Foundation and the Council of Europe

«ECTS BASED ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND STUDENT WORKLOAD»

MOSCOW 17-18 APRIL 2008

REPORT and RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Context

Both the Salamanca Convention of Higher Education Institutions (March, 2001) and the Prague and Berlin Conferences of Higher Education Ministers (September 2001, September 2003), agreed on the importance of credit systems for both transfer and accumulation, and on the need for progress on these issues.

In Zürich (October 2002), the participants of the EUA/ Swiss Confederation Conference 'Credit Transfer and Accumulation – the Challenge for Institutions and Students' agreed on a number of key features of credit transfer and accumulation and on the importance of introducing widely the ECTS as the only tried and tested credit system in Europe. At the same time, a number of open issues for further reflection were identified and brought forward to the Graz Convention of European Higher Education Institutions (May 2003), and the Berlin Ministers' meeting (September 2003).

In Edinburgh (February 2008), the Bologna seminar on learning outcomes endorsed the proposition that “learning outcomes are the basic building blocks of the Bologna package of educational reforms” and that this methodological approach is at the heart of the paradigm shift from teacher to student - centered learning. The seminar agreed that it was unhelpful to counterpoise learning outcomes and workload, since both elements were important in the use of ECTS.

In Moscow, at the Bologna seminar on ECTS and student workload, (April 2008) participants from European universities, student bodies, national ministries and international organizations agreed that ECTS credits are associated to learning outcomes and the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes.

II. Presentations

GERARD MADILL, Universities Scotland

ECTS and Learning Outcomes in the Context of Qualification Frameworks

In the presentation of the Scottish experience with learning outcomes (LOs) and ECTS it is made clear that National Qualification Frameworks provide the necessary setting for learning outcomes and ECTS-credits. Both Bologna and the EC provide model frameworks (compatible for the HE sector) and countries should make sure that their own frameworks are compatible with these models.

The introduction of credits based on student workload and the use of level descriptors (from the generic Dublin descriptors to programme and module descriptors) is a challenging task as it reflects a true paradigm shift from input to output-focussed programmes and from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach, for almost all the countries involved.

A case is made for the inclusion of all student work in arriving at the overall student workload (self-directed study, research, other preparatory work outside the classroom, etc.).

Special mention is made of the advantages of using ECTS and LOs. They are powerful tools for curriculum design, learning and review. They make a higher education institution's offer more transparent, thus highlighting its academic profile and sharpening its competitive edge. Learning is “de-mystified” for the students and makes it easier for them to plan ahead.

LOs and ECTS are important by themselves but their effect is boosted in their interaction with and reliance upon other aspects of the EHEA, viz., quality assurance, diploma supplement, mobility schemes, etc.

BASTIAN BAUMANN, Germany

Bastian Baumann gives his “personal” view of the picture, not only concerning Germany but also other European countries.

ECTS is very often implemented inconsistently and superficially, not giving equal attention to all the ECTS features (course catalogue/information package, learning agreement, transcript of records, and the voluntary European grading scale).

A common mistake is the counting of contact hours alone when it comes to establishing student workload.

It is essential that all stakeholders are involved in the calculation of student workload, that is, professors, students, deans and administrative staff. ECTS and learning outcomes are interconnected by the fact that ECTS expresses the workload which is necessary to achieve the expected outcomes!

The fact that all German degree programmes are subject to accreditation, and that the correct use of ECTS is an important factor in okaying programmes has led to an improvement in ECTS application and implementation.

ECTS is admittedly a complex issue and its implementation is no easy task, but it is an indispensable element in improving our national HE systems and in creating a EHEA

BRUNO CARAPINHA, European Students’ Union

It is pointed out that, generally, the over 11 million students in Europe should be allowed to play a more active role in Bologna.

Learning outcomes express what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to do after completing a study programme. This should be applicable to all types and settings of learning, formal, informal and non-formal. Students criticize the overly optimistic evaluation of the implementation on the European level, compared to the challenges that still exist in the implementation on the institutional level.

Especially in establishing learning outcomes it is necessary to stress the partnership approach, which is so typical for the Bologna process, in bringing together representatives of students, academics, university staff, employers,

employees, government and society.

The shift from the teacher perspective and content description to the learner perspective and the outcome description is closely followed and supported by students and should empower the learner.

Students should be given a bigger role in discussing curricula and learning goals which would, among others, provide for multiple career paths and a better choice. They also ask for a stronger say in teaching and assessment methods.

It is extremely important not only to “repackage” the old curricula into a new wrapping but to reform and redesign them taking into consideration what the final outcome and competences should be (focus on learner achievement).

While we use the generic “Dublin descriptors” it will also be necessary to work out subject-specific descriptors for single degree programmes.

At the same time consideration should be given to the enhancement of quality in HE and to introducing flexible learning paths. Recognition of prior learning and Lifelong Learning will constitute some of the future challenges in this connection.

Enhanced mobility and increased quality will be, a.o., the yardsticks of successful ECTS and learning outcome policies and implementation.

Contributions of Russian public and higher education institutions

These contributions reflect the state of affairs from the point of view of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the National Training Foundation or individual universities represented at the conference:

First I would like to make some general remarks to set the stage:

Russia joined the Bologna Process as full member of the Bologna Follow-up Group at the Berlin Conference of Ministers of Education in May 2003. Since then Russian higher education has undergone ample changes. In the March edition of the Russian-German Moscow Gazette (“*Moskauer Deutsche Zeitung Nr. 6 (229) März 2008*”) an article called “On the way to Europe via Bologna” the essential features of the transformation process is described. According to the article some universities have switched to the Bologna model but are still discussing the pros and cons. Completion of the process is scheduled to run until 2010 (but full implementation of all action lines and policies will definitely take longer for many countries).

Some universities have committed themselves whole-heartedly, whereas others are very reluctant to change. A very strong argument for change is the voluminous trade exchange with Europe which can only be improved by adopting comparable and compatible structures of higher education. The new

bachelor and master study architecture can be used to improve the quality and to enhance the content of study programmes. Another advantage lies in the flexibility of choice what to do upon graduating: to work and sound out the potential future career path, and to add a master's degree later, or to continue in a master programme right away, at home or abroad.

But a bachelor degree is also seen by some as something like an “incomplete” academic education; not so much as a programme in itself, but because it is believed that only few graduates will embark on a master programme later on, and will thus not earn a degree comparable to the traditional diploma programmes.

As the Russian higher education system is in the midst of sweeping changes right now it will take another couple of years to find out which way Bologna will go in its largest participating country.

Andrei Fursenko, the Russian Minister of Education and Science takes an optimistic view saying that criticism and fears are largely based on lack of information. He believes that the Bologna study architecture will allow every student to find his/her customized career path.

The presentations of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and university representatives can be seen against this general appraisal of the situation.

According to Ms. Nelly Rozina this seminar is the 5th in a series of spring conferences. Legal regulations concerning master studies and educational standards have been put in place. The description of learning outcomes has just started in Russia, and models of good practice are needed.

Russian students may correct and streamline their educational “trajectory” by choosing credits according to their individual study plans. Up to 50% of the curriculum may be individually selected this way. This looks like a high degree of flexibility, but it remains to be seen whether such a high proportion of electives does not come at the expense of focussing on the core qualifications of a given study programme.

When it comes to the **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)**, Russian universities generally tend to calculate credits using highly sophisticated mathematical models, on the basis of very long student working hours (1800 – 2000 class hours!). In Russia one credit equals up to 36 student working hours, with the Bologna average being 25 – 30 hours. As the correct and comparable implementation of ECTS is not only a challenge for Russia but for most of the Bologna countries, the ECTS key features and checklist developed jointly with the European Commission should be consulted in case of doubt.

Another challenge is the overall lack of support for higher education teachers

and staff to offset the additional working hours and infrastructure necessary to implement ECTS. Teachers do not generally receive much help in the dissemination of information necessary for a functioning ECTS, which may adversely affect the quality of teaching and research. Again this is a situation also known in the entire European Higher Education Area.

The continuously high drop-out rate reported by many presenters can, among others, be directly attributed to the unrealistically densely packed bachelor curricula. The mistake made is usually attributable to the attempt to take the old curricula and pack them in their entirety or in part into the new bachelor corset. Instead, it should be considered that not only has the duration of study changed, but also the content which must do justice to the (new) qualification required on graduation. This is a chance to throw overboard obsolete content and to introduce the latest findings of the respective academic field!

There is a strong desire for more assistance and information on introducing ECTS and **Learning Outcomes**. The positive role of TEMPUS is pointed out in this connection.

The theme of learning outcomes seems not to have gained as much attention as ECTS so far, as it was covered much less intensely. So far only “half-hearted” approaches have been undertaken to establish learning outcomes. This might be due to the fact that, as in most other Bologna countries, learning outcomes are only being developed together with and as important element of national qualification frameworks. There are not many examples of good practice available at this time, as only few countries have qualification frameworks in place. Scotland (Gerard Madill’s presentation) counts among those few.

Concern is raised about safeguarding and comparing the quality of curricula as ECTS and learning outcomes alone cannot do the job. The relationship among credits, learning outcomes, grading, and quality is mentioned and discussed. It is agreed that these features are associated through a combination of the duration of studies, the application of the European Standards and Guidelines, thorough planning of the curriculum against the expected competences, and a realistic and well-monitored allocation of credits based on student workload.

It is recommended that anyone interested in further and in-depth discussions of qualification frameworks, learning outcomes, and ECTS consult the Bologna website and the reports and presentations it offers on these topics:

<http://www.bologna2009benelux.org> (Bologna seminars)

III. SEMINAR CONCLUSIONS

- There is a great need for a common terminology based on a shared understanding amongst staff, students and other stakeholders about what the key concepts mean.
- Learning should be described using an outcome-based approach at various stages, i.e., in the Frameworks at European and national levels, program, and module levels, to facilitate recognition and mobility (Matryoshka doll system).
- Descriptors used in national frameworks (including at programme level) should be consistent with those at the European level while allowing for diversity.
- In order to empower students, to facilitate life-long learning, and to allow flexibility, public authorities, university staff and students need to recognize that the shift from an input to an output-oriented approach requires a culture shift at all levels.
- Proper implementation of ECTS requires concerted action by public authorities and all the other stakeholders if we are to bridge the gap between commitments made and actual practice.
- National and institutional quality assurance procedures based on the European standards and guidelines must address the use of ECTS based on student work load and learning outcomes.
- Proper implementation of ECTS is a fundamental tool for planning curricula and enhancing their quality and transparency.
- In order to arrive at realistic workloads and credit allocation, the involvement of students in the calculation and verification of workload is indispensable.
- Progress in the implementation of ECTS, description of learning outcomes and setting up of NQF should be properly assessed.

The conclusions will be presented formally to the Bologna Follow-Up Group for inclusion in the preparation of the Ministers' meeting hosted by the Benelux countries in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve on 28-29 April 2009.

Gottfried Bacher, General Rapporteur

