

The intended and unintended effects of the Bologna reforms

by

Sybille Reichert

Reichert Consulting: Policy and Strategy Development in Higher Education,
Switzerland

Bologna reform eulogies and protests tend to focus on the benefits and shortcomings of the new two-tier curricula, their implementation and orientation. In this article, an assessment of the Bologna reforms is made in terms of their larger and less widely discussed systemic and institutional effects – which go far beyond the original reformers’ intentions. Apart from the introduction of new degree structures, the two Bologna reform dimensions which have been most readily adopted and dynamically implemented are the overhaul of Europe’s quality assurance system and the recent reforms of doctoral education. In contrast, the visionary goals of using learning outcomes and competencies as the structuring principle of all curricula in order to ensure greater transparency and reliability, and of promoting student-centred learning, have only been adopted by few countries and institutions. However, the Bologna reforms have also had a range of unintended effects on systems and institutions that often go unnoticed when discussing their impact on European higher education. These include redefining the relationship between institutional profiles, strengthening central institutional leadership and mobilising horizontal communication within institutions.

Les réformes de Bologne : effets prévus et imprévus

par

Sybille Reichert

Reichert Consulting : Développements politique et stratégique
dans l'enseignement supérieur, Suisse

Les éloges de la réforme de Bologne et les protestations dont elle a fait l'objet ont tendance à se concentrer sur les avantages et les inconvénients du nouveau cursus réparti sur deux cycles, sur sa mise en œuvre et sur l'orientation. Cet article constitue une évaluation des réformes de Bologne en termes de leurs conséquences, plus importantes mais moins débattues, au niveau systémique et institutionnel, qui vont bien au-delà des intentions d'origine des auteurs de la réforme. Au-delà de l'introduction de nouvelles structures de cycle, les deux dimensions de la réforme de Bologne qui ont été adoptées le plus facilement et mises en œuvre avec la plus grande dynamique sont la restructuration des systèmes d'assurance de la qualité en Europe et les récentes réformes de l'enseignement doctoral. En revanche, les objectifs visés par l'utilisation des résultats de l'enseignement et des compétences comme le principe de structuration de tous les cursus afin d'assurer une plus grande transparence et une meilleure fiabilité, et de promouvoir un enseignement centré sur l'étudiant ont uniquement été adoptés par de rares pays et institutions. Toutefois, les réformes de Bologne ont également entraîné une série de conséquences imprévues sur les systèmes et les institutions qui passent souvent inaperçues lorsque l'on parle de leur impact sur l'enseignement supérieur européen. Ces conséquences incluent la redéfinition des rapports entre les profils institutionnels, le renforcement de la position centrale des institutions et la mobilisation horizontale de la communication au sein des institutions.

Introduction

Ten years after the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, the Bologna reforms are still debated as fervently as in the initial years of their development. Student protests in Austria, France, Germany, Greece and Spain are being waged in the name of Bologna; disgruntled professors criticise its implementation in internal and public meetings and the media. At the same time, policy makers and higher education representatives in Europe and abroad applaud the scope and depth of the changes. Ten years ago it would have been beyond most people's expectations that the Bologna reforms would manage to mobilise so many academics and students into discussion, protest, criticism, fervent support or engaged appeals, and into spending hundreds of hours in meetings to orchestrate changes in courses, standards and procedures.

When a group of ministers of education signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, their goals were seen by many stakeholders as another instance of unreliable rhetoric which has become a feature of many European ministerial meetings on education: no ties attached, no contractual obligations, no previous discussions with finance ministers, no actions to follow. But in the case of Bologna, the sceptics were proven wrong. Twenty-nine ministers committed to a common agenda of concerted national reforms of their higher education systems in order to create more transparent and comprehensible degree structures in a common European Higher Education Area. This engagement soon turned into action plans, debates with the higher education sector, new regulations and orchestrated institutional reforms across entire countries. A few early adopters forged ahead with the formulation of new laws and national action plans, and made others feel obliged to follow up on their own declarations to avoid loss of face. Rhythmed by their biennial meetings, a remarkable inter-ministerial peer pressure game emerged. Regular monitoring brought about naming and shaming, and sector consultation added sense, details and additional dimensions to the broad strokes of reform goals. Out of the Bologna Declaration grew the Bologna reforms, welcomed by some, hated by others. Everyone in the higher education sector, from policy makers to professors and administrators, was kept busy in consultations on legislation at national level, in curricular and administrative restructuring at institutional level, and in devising new or revising old quality assurance processes at all levels.

So what are we to make of this past decade of far-reaching national reforms and their unprecedented degree of European orchestration? What are the major achievements to date? Where have the reforms fallen short of the expectations vested in them by the most convinced reformers? What unintended effects can one observe, good or bad? And where should the reform process be heading if it wants to live up to its fundamental goal of improving the quality and international attractiveness of higher education in Europe?

When making any summary assessments and observations regarding the effects of the Bologna reforms, access to relevant data constitutes a challenge. While the official stocktaking reports are updated every two years (as a basis for the ministers' meetings), they provide generally aggregated data but lack details about institutional realities. Moreover, their presentation of national situations has, in some cases – and at least until 2007 (the 2009 report being more scrutinising) – glossed over some higher education institutions' awkward facts to avoid national loss of face.

To gain insights into institutional realities and challenges, the best comparative sources are the European University Association (EUA)'s *Trends* reports, last published in 2007, which base their assessments on surveys of a large part of the sector (over 800 institutions). Unfortunately, the next report will only be published in March 2010, and its comparative institutional data comparing realities across Europe is at least two years old. The only other comparative study which has generated its own data through surveys and interviews (Witte, 2006) is even older. A more recent comparative study looking at some of the effects of the reforms through student surveys was carried out by the European Student Union (2008). And in some countries, such as the Netherlands (Westerheijden *et al.*, 2008), Germany (Winter, 2009) and Switzerland (CRUS, 2008; Dell'Ambrogio *et al.*, 2009), studies of the Bologna implementation, institutional realities and effects are available now. They contain much more detailed analyses than can be found in the official national stocktaking reports.

However, although the Bologna process is applied by 46 countries, very few of them have drawn up such reports: the institutional implementation is still too young in most countries to evaluate the new curricula and their effects as the key ingredient of the reforms. Also, they do not offer any trans-national comparative data. An extensive comparative study of the effects of Bologna implementation in the 46 participating countries is currently being undertaken by a European consortium (including CHEPS University of Twente, INCHER at the University of Kassel and ECOTECH in the United Kingdom). This study will fill the gap, but results will only be published in 2010. For the time being, only the above-mentioned data sources – as well as the many institutional visits the author has undertaken during the course of her work – could reasonably be used as a base for observations and assessments.

To assess the successes and shortcomings of the Bologna reforms to date, one needs to distinguish between two types of effects: those that were intended (even though such intentions may have been vague), planned, monitored and widely discussed among policy makers and higher education representatives, and those that emerged unintentionally, mostly unnoticed and rarely appreciated. It will be argued later in this paper that these latter effects are perhaps even more profound and transformative than the intended actions that followed the Bologna objectives.

The intended effects of the Bologna reforms: their achievements and shortfalls

A new European policy arena

First and foremost, the Bologna Process has produced a new form of trans-national policy development which triggers off multiple national processes of decision making. It sets soft norms and places them in a context of trans-national pressure to comply, combining top-down initiatives with bottom-up agenda setting. Moreover, it intertwines national and European policy issues in mutually reinforcing effects and, through its organisational process, catalyses and accelerates national higher education reforms. While the intention of this process was to create a European Higher Education Area, some effects (as will be discussed in the section below on unintended effects) went well beyond the intention of creating a common arena for policy exchange.

The idea of bringing together national policy discussions in a European forum of exchange had already begun to take form in the 1990s through various initiatives of the European Commission and the regular European Council of Ministers meetings. The Bologna Process went beyond this forum, however, by virtue of its committed nature, its closely knit follow-up process and its links to defined national actions. Instead of the Commission developing policy issues in a common context to elicit national responses, Bologna introduced a nationally driven European process in which common issues were defined by combining top-down initiatives with bottom-up agenda-setting. While the reforms seemed imposed at first – given that the ministers took the first initiative with the Bologna Declaration in 1999 – the actual interpretation and details of the initially vague agenda were co-defined by representatives of the higher education sectors working through representative organisations. At European level, these included the European University Association (or its predecessor CRE before 2002), EURASHE (the European association of non-university higher education institutions). At national level, higher education associations fed their input into the “Bologna Follow-up” process.

From the Prague Communiqué (2001) onwards, the higher education sector contributed actively to the definition of the Bologna reform agenda, adding areas of reform activity such as the doctoral education reforms, or re-emphasising other aspects such as the autonomy needed to modernise universities. Likewise, the quality assurance dimension of the Bologna reforms was defined in close co-operation with the quality assurance agencies (through the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA). The higher education sector was represented through the European University Association, and the students represented by the European Students' Union. The latter emphasised, for example, the importance of higher education as a public value and that of the social dimension of European higher education (including questions of access and stipends). These bodies also repeatedly reminded the political authorities about the vision of flexible learning paths as a goal of the curricular reforms. Thus, reform issues were added or emphasised by the sector itself, and originally vague concepts were spelt out in terms of more operational reform plans.

The act of defining a higher education policy agenda at European level and translating the European reform agenda into multiple national reform contexts also resulted in a confluence of reform agendas. At European level, the Bologna objective of creating a common Higher Education Area was soon linked with the Lisbon agenda which sought to create a common European Research Area (ERA), as well as to increase research and innovation competitiveness and investment in research and development. Existing channels of communication were used by policy entrepreneurs from both policy domains. The modernisation of universities and the reforms of research training served as a bridge between both areas and allowed for mutual policy influence. Likewise, at national level, local reform issues were linked to the Bologna reforms. In the end, it is hard to tell whether the Bologna reforms pushed the national reforms or *vice versa*, but a mutual reinforcement effect can be noted in most contexts (see the section below on unintended effects).

From minimal compliance to far-reaching institutional change

Close to the self-imposed deadline of 2010, the top reform objectives appear, at first glance, to have been implemented in most signatory countries, at least in all those which had signed the Declaration by 2003. The cornerstone of the reforms, the introduction of a two-tier bachelor/master degree structure, seems to have been largely achieved. According to the last European University Association *Trends* report (Crosier *et al.*, 2007), 83% of higher education institutions (out of a sample of roughly 1 000) indicated that they had the new two- or three-cycle structure (including the doctoral level) in place. By 2010, the vast majority of students will be enrolled in programmes reflecting the Bologna structures.

In many countries curricular reforms remain rather formal and superficial in nature, in comparison to the more ambitious expectations vested in them originally. In principle, the introduction of more learner-centred teaching and the definition of flexible curricula in terms of competences and skills should have improved the quality and international attractiveness of European higher education; however, this has not yet been achieved. To bring about these improvements, better student-staff ratios, didactic training and other staff development measures would have been needed, as well as substantial investments which few countries were ready to provide. However, in most countries, many institutions' budgets are already stretched given the increase in their counselling activities which has not been off-set by greater funding.

Furthermore, in many countries, higher education institutions undertook far-reaching curricular restructuring without abandoning the old expectations of knowledge scope and range, sometimes pressing as many courses into the short programmes as the territorial negotiations between professors would allow. Hence students may have less time for independent study than before, less room for individualised optional courses, even less flexibility to integrate mobility time within their programme. This is in total contradiction with the essential Bologna goals. While ministers can evade this reform aim and see their country appear in saturated green in the Bologna Follow-up monitoring reports, students are losing hope and patience with the realities of their everyday student life, and some are even staging large-scale protests.

Behind this generalised comment, however, one should distinguish a wide range of institutional realities. These vary not only between but also within countries and even within institutions, ranging from reforms that amount to mere cosmetic surgery to deep institutional reforms addressing past problems such as fragmented curricula or ineffective teaching methodologies. As the *Trends* studies have shown (Reichert and Tauch, 2005; Crosier et al., 2007), many institutions have actually adopted the reforms as an opportunity to address a range of changes which they had not been able to promote as easily without such external pressure. For a sizeable minority of institutions the reforms have meant introducing new teaching approaches and curricular design principles, more options and flexible interfaces between programmes, more opportunities for interdisciplinary study and research, and new internal quality assurance processes. At many institutions, the new master level became the focus of institutional positioning by developing new interdisciplinary programmes in areas of strengths, or by addressing new professional profiles. In contrast, other institutions (even when working in the same regulatory framework) chose to implement the reforms in a minimalist fashion by simply regrouping existing courses and creating a pro-forma *cesura* between the bachelor and master levels, with the expectation that most

students would go straight from one level to the other without any change of direction or institution.

Similarly, the definition of learning outcomes for each course or qualification profiles for whole programmes had mixed results. It was seen as a useful opportunity for reflection and reorientation by some institutions and merely as a bureaucratic exercise by others.

These institutional choices are attributable to three factors:

1. The willingness of national policy makers and administrators to develop the reform details and processes in close consultation with institutions, taking account of their aims and concerns. This attitude was crucial in helping them to develop their sense of ownership, in defining reform contents that were perceived to be meaningful to higher education leaders, teachers and students, and in providing information and support adapted to institutional needs.
2. The resources invested in the reform process and measures. Given the proposed breadth and depth of the reforms, these were essential if provision was to be made for the additional staff to support curricula with more options, to allow for teaching in smaller groups, as well as for promoting competencies. In 2005, only seven countries had actually committed additional funds to help institutions implement the reforms. Even fewer (e.g. Norway and Switzerland) invested additional resources to support the more staff-intensive approaches to teaching and curricular design which the Bologna reforms had proposed.
3. The willingness and ability of rectors and vice-chancellors to lead the institutional reform process. Given the scope of the reform project and the fact that it concerned all academic units, institutional leadership and central management support were vital to the success of the reforms. One may even look at Bologna implementation as a sort of leadership test for many rectors, with a challenge factor added at the more decentralised and conservative institutions. At departmental level, substantial resistance was encountered. Rectors had to strike the right balance between persuasion and swift decisions and actions. The ability to create a coherent approach to quality improvement was a challenge in itself. The resulting resistance was exacerbated by the fact that other reforms were often introduced at the same time. In particular, there were simultaneous changes which introduced new forms of higher education governance (these preceded or accompanied the Bologna reforms in many countries and increased institutional autonomy as well as central leadership); they were received with mixed feelings at departmental level.

4. Problem awareness. As many interviews with institutional actors in the framework of the *Trends* reports showed, the success of Bologna reform implementation depended strongly on overall institutional perceptions of the need for reform. Wherever the need for improvement in related areas had already been identified, the Bologna reforms were much more easily adopted and developed into an institutional improvement programme (Reichert and Tauch, 2005; Crosier et al., 2007).

Limited progress on the transition to student-centred teaching

The varied successes of the curricular reforms are mirrored in the mixed reactions of the higher education sector to the idea of introducing student-centred teaching and learning. It should be noted that this objective was only integrated into the explicit European reform agenda as a second step, even though some reform visionaries and many students had attributed the highest importance to it from the beginning. Moreover, since this objective required more favourable student-staff ratios than most institutions currently boast, only few governments adopted an explicit reference to introducing more student-centred teaching approaches in their reforms.

In fact, only few institutions have made the transition to student-centred or competency-based teaching and learning a key part of their curricular reforms. This is because no countries were ready to invest the full range of resources needed to realise such far-reaching pedagogical change. It was only under pressure from student representatives in the European Bologna Follow-up Group that the objective of greater student-centred teaching received more political and rhetorical attention in recent years, although financial backing was rare. Most recently (November 2009), the European Students' Union launched a project to shed more light on the realities of current teaching conditions and competency-based teaching, in the hope of raising awareness of the need for more student-centred teaching. However, there is still little national money to "walk the talk" and only few university teachers or leaders are willing to make this change their primary cause. One would hope that the 2009 student protests will exert some pressure on politicians to take these concerns seriously, but the medium-term budget restrictions after the financial crisis do not help the cause.

A similar fate befell the accompanying transparency instruments, the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement. Implementation appears to be far-reaching if one looks at the number of institutions that have formally introduced these instruments across their institutions. A vast majority of institutions are now using the ECTS as their credit accumulation system and providing Diploma Supplements to make the student records more readable for employers. However, more often than not, these instruments are not being applied according to the way they were

designed in the recent Bologna context, i.e. by including explicit reference to learning outcomes and/or competency profiles. Frequently, contact hour-based course credits were simply multiplied to calculate the new ECTS, without any attention being paid to actual workload or to the contribution of the module to clearly defined learning outcomes, as had been intended.

At national level, the Qualifications Framework – which ministers agreed to develop in 2005 (Bergen Communiqué) to describe levels of competencies at different degree levels for employers or students – has only recently been developed. Moreover, the combination of all these competency-based instruments into a continuous tapestry – which should foster competency and learning outcome orientation at all levels – still remains a vision for the future. Nevertheless, some of the new national qualifications frameworks are clearly designed to offer more reliable opportunities for transition between different types of higher education institution. Articulation between different types of institution and levels of higher education has become a key concern for Ireland, Germany and Switzerland. It has even spilled over to other continents, where qualifications frameworks have been revised in light of European developments: this is the case for the Australian Qualifications Framework 2009. Interest in some of the European methods is also growing (as is the case in the United States (Tuning USA Conference, April 2009; AACU Conference, January 2010). Significant efforts still need to be made before there will be fluid transition between different types of higher education institutions. However, the new transparency which prevails is making it more difficult for institutions to close their doors to applicants from other types of institution which lack sound arguments relating to the reality of competencies.

Signs of changing attitudes

However disappointing the achievements may seem to date to all those who had invested high hopes in the Bologna Process as an accelerated solution for urgent reforms, one should not jump to pessimistic conclusions. There are increasing signs of a slow but remarkable attitudinal change in teaching and curricular design. Within institutions, an increasing number of departments or faculties are becoming interested in more profound reflection on the competencies their programmes are meant to promote and on the methods needed to assess them. More and more departments are discussing student-centred teaching concepts, defining learning outcomes for their programmes and courses, experimenting with competency-based curricula and new assessment methods. Many institutions have intensified their efforts (e.g. through programme boards) to entertain a more regular dialogue with employers on the relevance of their curricula and the competencies of their graduates. To consider societal or employer needs in the context of course development is no longer seen as selling out academic values, except in a few

academic niches. While “employability” may still be regarded as a provocative term in many European academic circles and is often associated with short-term perspectives, the need to prepare students for long-term adaptability to changing labour markets is indeed being taken seriously as an aim of higher education programmes.

Engagement in this deeper reform agenda started with a few early adopters, mostly located in north-west Europe, and is spreading east and southwards, in many cases facilitated by European conferences and national best-practice workshops. An external indication of such a shift is the fact that the availability and quality of counselling and tutoring services has expanded significantly, as has the attention to student needs in services and internal quality assurance processes (Crosier *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, even where institutions had initially engaged in reforms somewhat reluctantly, many now perceive benefits, or at least potential, in terms of greater flexibility within and between programmes and institutions.

The most dynamic areas of the Bologna reforms: quality assurance and doctoral reforms

Other than the central question of curricular reform, the Bologna reforms have developed greatest momentum in the area of quality assurance. Profound reforms, increased compatibility and heightened attention to robust internal and external quality assurance may be regarded as the most resounding successes of the Bologna Process so far. Beyond the introduction of common standards for external quality assurance (QA), the idea of constant self-improvement and voluntary integrated institutional quality processes beyond simple accountability is spreading across Europe, as institutional data from the *Trends* reports and many quality audit reports suggest.

The key focus of the Bologna reforms, however, has been on processes relating to external QA, common QA standards, guidelines and comparability across Europe, as well as exchange and mutual understanding between QA agencies. The European Standards and Guidelines for QA (2005) include a common approach (often called misleadingly a “methodology”). This comprises regular institutional or programme reviews involving self-evaluations and external peer reviews, leading to improvement measures, as well as student participation in QA processes and on evaluation panels. The fact that all higher education institutions and systems will have to apply these common elements of QA through their own national QA processes will have a profound impact on institutional quality awareness and processes. To be accepted onto the European Register of QA Agencies (the mechanism introduced in 2008 to ensure that quality agencies comply with the common European guidelines) is already proving to be more demanding than even some well-established QA or accreditation agencies would have anticipated.

Since external quality assurance, agency formation and new QA processes have kept higher education institutions well occupied, the concern with institutional quality culture, which the EUA has attempted to emphasize, has not been as highly prioritised. In light of new governance structures and recently increased autonomy in many European countries (CHEPS *et al.*, 2007), issues of accountability and external quality control seem to dominate the quality discussion. In future, the Bologna reforms will have to face the challenge of how to consolidate the added value of quality assurance reforms while keeping the spirit of regular voluntary self-improvement alive. Higher education institutions are caught in an increasingly dense Web of external reviews. As funding sources diversify, accountability demands are also diversifying. Quality assurance is becoming more compliance and accountability-driven, with less time and energy and motivation left for genuinely improvement-oriented quality assurance processes. In the next decade, QA fatigue may be the biggest challenge for the more mature QA systems.

Given Bologna's focus on teaching and learning, other QA issues (in the wider sense of the term) have not been addressed in spite of their important impact on institutional and individual behaviour. These include, for example, the impact of popular international rankings on concepts of quality measurement as well as on institutional behaviour (Hazelkorn, 2008) which also raises concerns about policy priorities and resource allocation in the future. Higher education policy makers across Europe will be challenged to strike the right balance between the demands of research quality and international competition, on the one hand, and the many other necessary functions of higher education and their quality demands, including the need to cater for larger and more diverse groups of knowledge users and producers (Reichert, 2009). At the most recent Bologna ministerial meeting, the challenge of institutional diversity was explicitly mentioned. We can therefore expect that Europe's key policy makers will make use of the successful communication channels which have been built up in the context of Bologna for these wider policy issues, not so much to develop common guidelines or standards, but to exchange ideas and good practice.

The other reform area in which remarkable momentum has been achieved is that of doctoral education (added to the Bologna reform agenda via the Berlin Communiqué in 2003). This area was given policy prominence because of the increased attention on Europe's international research competitiveness. In particular, the attractiveness of European universities to young researchers has become a key concern in times of increasing brain circulation or potential brain drain. But beyond the concern with the attractiveness of the European Research Area, recent attention has also focused on the quality and relevance of doctoral education, as part of the wider Bologna concern with societal relevance and employability. This

becomes apparent in the competency orientation of newly developed doctoral programmes which often seek to address diversified research careers by fostering research-related transferable skills (such as research project management skills, team skills, presentation skills). Reform efforts concerning graduate programmes and graduate schools have also resulted from a heightened awareness of the need to improve the quality of teaching, supervision and tutoring, reflecting the systematic quality assurance perspective which Bologna has helped to foster. This is also reflected in the rising popularity of graduate schools, which place importance on supervision quality, doctoral committees, reliable doctoral agreements, opportunities for interdisciplinary exchanges, relevant skills training and career development.

All in all, the intended effects of the Bologna reforms have been slowest where hopes were highest, namely in the planned widespread reforms of teaching quality and approaches (competency and learning outcome orientation), since these involve attitudinal changes rather than mere changes of procedures and structures. In contrast, the intended effects have been strongest and fastest in what may at first have appeared to be more secondary areas of activity. Most change took place in areas where the reforms were clearly led by concerned actors and sectors: quality assurance awareness, good practice and mutual trust have spread faster and more deeply than many of us predicted in 1999. These good surprises are due to the persistent engagement of QA agencies through ENQA, the higher education sector (through the European University Association and the European Association of Higher Education Institutions) and students (through the European Students' Union). Doctoral reforms have developed a momentum and institutional initiative which few would have predicted in 2003. Again, intense sector engagement (through EUA and others) contributed to the high level of activity in this domain, supported by the urgent interest in improved international competitiveness of university research training in some national systems.

Unintended effects: system shifts and institution building

In addition to the effects of explicit Bologna actions, one should highlight the deeper and less predictable side-effects which the Bologna reforms have brought about, both at system and institutional levels. While these effects would not have occurred without the breadth and depth of the Bologna agenda, they have not been consciously pursued and are rarely noted. Nevertheless they may have changed higher education in Europe even more profoundly.

Among the unintended effects of the Bologna reform process, four system-level ones are of particular interest to higher education researchers and policy makers.

Increased transnational policy osmosis

The Bologna Process has created such a dense network of policy makers and institutional leaders exchanging good practice or policies that new ideas and choices are much more easily and rapidly transferred from one national or institutional context to another than in the past. While solutions are adapted to local constraints and conditions, issues and policy options are exchanged between different national contexts. In fact, policy discussion between countries has reached such intensity that it makes the European higher education landscape begin indeed to resemble a common European Higher Education Area. Bologna has enabled frequent transnational exchanges and policy consultation between European rectors' conferences, university presidents and relevant agencies facing similar systemic transitions or policy dilemmas. Such policy exchanges go far beyond the scope of the Bologna action lines, encompassing such questions as research evaluation schemes, schemes to promote vertical differentiation among higher education institutions, or experiences with institutional mergers and consortia.

Bologna's role as catalyst for other higher education reforms

The Bologna rhetoric in favour of urgent qualitative improvements and international competitiveness and the far-reaching systemic implications of its curricular and quality objectives have not only mobilised everyone in higher education but also acted as a catalyst – or even framework – for other national reforms. Many national reform agendas went well beyond the Bologna action plan, but were presented as inevitable ingredients of an increasingly international higher education arena, and closely associated with the Bologna agenda. In addition, the simultaneous Lisbon agenda with its emphasis on innovation reinforced the relevance theme even further. Such reforms comprised greater institutional autonomy, new governance structures with stronger institutional leadership and more direct stakeholder influence, as well as increased proportions of performance-based funding. Examples of deeper system changes which were attached to the Bologna agenda can be found in Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, some of the German *Länder*, Belgian Flanders, Portugal, Slovakia and (recently) Spain. A recent study on governance in Europe funded by the European Commission documents these convergences (CHEPS *et al.*, 2007).

Renegotiated institutional profiles and “vocational drift”

Through the new bachelor's degrees emphasis on graduates' employability and labour market relevance, the Bologna reforms have strengthened the professional orientation of higher education. Consequently, they have also strengthened the position of professionally oriented

institutions such as University Colleges, *Hogeschols* or *Fachhochschulen*, as can be seen for instance in Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Due to the growing importance given to innovation by many countries as well as the EU (Lisbon agenda), the non-traditional functions of universities have risen in public recognition and status to such an extent that even some traditional universities are pushing the innovation and professional orientation of their research and teaching programmes.

Given the rise of public attention to widely used international rankings, the so-called research universities are increasingly seen as a primary element of an internationally oriented higher education system. Nevertheless, given that greater attention is being paid to the relevance and contributions of research to innovation and societal challenges, the role of research which is driven simply by curiosity and traditional academic research training has been weakened. Likewise, research training is seen as an important preparation for non-academic research and employment, as illustrated by the attention to transferable research skills training. Considerable research training reform efforts which widen the scope and utility of research training can be found in Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Belgium and France. In light of these more utilitarian attitudes to higher education, universities are becoming less traditional, and the few remaining ivory towers are being dismantled.

At the same time, professionally oriented university colleges are expanding their applied research activities, with the help of state funds and new funding instruments, and up-grading the research profiles of their staff. Thus, the dividing lines between the old institutional types (universities vs. *Fachhochschulen*) are no longer defined by the presence or absence of research or research training, but rather by the (weakening) basic research orientation of the universities versus the business responsiveness of university colleges (Reichert, 2009). Increasingly, it is expected that the dividing lines between different types of institution will be blurred, and smooth transitions between them will characterise the overall systems (helped by the new qualifications frameworks). This is despite the fact that separate institutional types with their different mission mixes are still politically desirable in most dual and even integrated higher education systems in Europe.

Whether such institutional differentiation and complementarity will survive in the long term will depend on differentiated financial and career incentives for the different institutional orientations (Reichert, 2009). Bologna's relevance agenda has pushed these questions to the foreground and has set the stage for a new conflict between institutional types and profiles over resources and support.

Mass versus elite degrees

The *Trends* studies on the implementation of the Bologna reforms show that the new two-tier curricula have often been conceived essentially as a mass-oriented bachelor's and a selective or elite master's programme. While many systems continue to regard the master's as the main university degree and so-called consecutive masters have been put in place to guarantee such continuity, the nature of the first three years has clearly changed. This is partly due to the overburdened programme structure into which too many of the five-year course ingredients have been crammed. The more elective offerings have covered research project work, and independent study has often been pushed back to a secondary level. Staff-intensive research training has been restricted to the master's level. In addition, many new specialised and explicitly selective master programmes have been developed to help position the research strengths of the respective institution. The master's level is becoming a marketing arena for higher education institutions where institutional profiling and selectivity are given free reign. Whenever bachelor's degree education is accessible to all holders of high school diploma, and when master's programmes are selective, there are signs of institutions differentiating their mass and élite cohorts along bachelor's and master's lines. Some less well-resourced national systems (such as that of Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic) already allow only the best qualified students to continue into master's programmes. The extent to which bachelor's degrees become the main degree – at least in some fields – will ultimately be determined by cost pressures and labour market reactions to the new degrees.

At institutional level, the Bologna reforms have had three major unintended effects.

Strengthened central leadership

The Bologna reforms have required institution-wide consultation and decision-making processes of an unusual breadth and depth. Deliberations had to cover all subject areas, delving into the *raison d'être*, organisation and contents of programmes; they raised over-arching concerns with common guidelines and approaches to new degrees as well as to the quality processes underpinning their creation and future management. To steer such a review and reform process over a short time required strong central leadership and support. Moreover, formal, strong central leadership was made possible for the first time in some countries. While these reforms were not only generated as part of the Bologna reforms, they reinforced each other. With greater autonomy and increased accountability demands, central administrations had to face a range of new tasks. At the same time, the competitiveness rhetoric resulted in more competitive funding arrangements which tended to

promote the need for strategic positioning and priority setting. While many of these changes were not explicitly part of the Bologna measures, they were experienced by academics and students as an effect of the overall reform agenda. For many, Bologna has become the symbol of changed higher education attitudes, of a different academic culture and landscape. Remarkably, in several countries the new governance structures were seen as an erosion of academic freedom, egalitarian values and democratic culture, resulting in controversy from students and academics (e.g. France and Spain).

Increasing stakeholder influence

Associated with the central concern of social and labour market relevance and relevant competency profiles, the Bologna reforms have contributed to increased communication with stakeholders. Even though dialogue was already well developed in some subject areas such as engineering, medicine, economics, business management and law, and in all professionally oriented higher education institutions, the Bologna reforms have broadened its scope and raised its status. Stakeholder influence has also been strengthened by the introduction of new governance structures such as stakeholder boards which serve as executive or advisory bodies in higher education institutions. This is the case in Austria, Denmark, Norway, many of the German *Länder*, Spain and finally the Netherlands, where stakeholder boards are already well established. While the direct influence of external stakeholders still raises scepticism at most traditional institutions, the idea of consulting outside partners on programme orientation is now more widely accepted among academics from all types of institutions.

Increased horizontal communication

The Bologna reform process has, in many instances, contributed to institution building beyond the often disjointed array of separate faculties. Given that the reforms involved a simultaneous review and overhaul of programmes in all institutions, many of them made use of this opportunity to develop closer interfaces between disciplines, pathways from several disciplinary areas to an interdisciplinary programme at master level, or to establish new interdisciplinary programmes. Often, new curricular structures contributed to softening the boundaries between faculties or departments, which often act as obstacles to institutional innovation. Sometimes, institutional incentives, such as strategic reserves, have been established or expanded to foster interdisciplinary programmes or research. Especially at the new master's and doctoral level, such new interfaces were sought and institutionalised in new graduate programmes or schools or new interdisciplinary "centres of excellence". Examples of such developments abound in France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. They

have contributed to the creation of a matrix structure in institutions, cutting across and often weakening existing territorial and traditional decision-making boundaries. Moreover, enhanced communication and deliberation across internal administrative boundaries were needed to review and expand quality assurance processes and develop transparency instruments, such as ECTS, diploma supplements or guidelines for qualification profiles. This has resulted in side benefits such as new opportunities for internal co-operation and information flow (Reichert and Tauch, 2005).

Conclusion

Ten years after its inaugural Declaration, the Bologna reform process has led to an unprecedented wave of systemic and institutional change. However, only some of these changes were intended effects of the Bologna agenda. Among the intended reforms, implementation has been remarkably swift and efficient in the new two-tier curricular structures, the commonly aligned quality assurance systems and the widespread doctoral education reforms. However, whether these reforms will be effective enough to achieve the overall goal of quality improvement remains to be seen.

With respect to the deeper visions of change, more time and resources will be required. Student-centred teaching approaches and curricula that are organised around agreed and assessable definitions of learning outcomes and competencies presuppose attitudinal changes as well as staff development measures. These new approaches need appropriate reward structures which have to be developed through continuous academic leadership and persuasion. Such new teaching methodologies also require better student-staff ratios than most programmes in continental Europe currently offer. Nevertheless, given that so many institutions have embarked on this reform path and that teaching quality has become a key, widespread institutional concern, Europe may well witness an unparalleled leap forward in teaching performance and quality over the next decade.

It is doubtful, however, given the limited resources available, whether such a major change in attitudes and teaching methodologies will occur in a co-ordinated and consistent way across the whole of Europe. It also remains to be seen whether the vision of a Europe in which a substantial proportion of students and graduates will study or work abroad, with full recognition of their prior studies and qualifications, will become a reality within the next decade. This would presuppose a more substantial investment in higher education than most states are currently prepared to provide. But beyond such hopes for the realisation of Bologna's original vision and potential, one should also note the many positive effects on institutional development that Bologna has helped to achieve, even though they were not part of the original vision.

The author:

Sybille Reichert

Germania Str. 41

8006 Zürich

Switzerland

E-mail: sybille@reichertconsulting.ch

www.reichertconsulting.ch

No specific funding source was called upon to support the research presented.

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