

How have the Bologna Reforms changed European Higher Education and promoted Student Centered Learning?

Sybille Reichert
AAC&U Conference, Washington D.C.
21 January 2010

Key motivations behind Bologna Declaration in 1999

- Insufficient ability to adapt to demands of massified HE
 - High-drop-out rates,
 - Long study duration
 - Insufficient attention to diverse needs and qualifications
 - High unemployment of HE graduates – employability?
 - Increasing participation rates ⇒ exploding cost? Bachelor sufficient for labour market entry?
- Fragmented HE landscape with different degree structures and lengths – not readable for outsiders ⇒ Lack of attractiveness of European HE systems – brain drain
- European Mobility had reached a threshold (with remaining widespread recognition problems)
- European citizenship with sufficient intercultural competence and European identification?
- Build common market for European graduates and researchers

The European Higher Education Area: A Vision

- Increase the readability of the degree structures and their contents to help mutual recognition and mobility (inter-cultural competences in a global world)
- Increase the flexibility of learning paths to take account of diverse student profiles and needs
- Move from teacher-centered to student-centered perspectives in teaching and curricular design: structured around student qualifications and learning outcomes
- Enhance quality development and assurance and trust among the agencies / systems to allow for mutual recognition
- Create a common market of European graduates (incl. PhDs)
⇒ more effective, more competitive, more cooperative and internationally open, globally responsive knowledge economies

The Bologna pan-European Reform Process

- A **voluntary process**: Inter-Governmental process without contractual commitment & but dense sector-driven follow-up process -- policy development through soft norms; compliance through peer pressure helped by National Reports & “Stocktaking”
- 46 countries signed up
- Reforms at **national** and **institutional** level, linked with other national and European reform agendas
- **Shared responsibility**: governments, universities, staff & students (Bologna Follow-Up Group, national implem.)
- Every 2 years: **Joint Ministerial Meeting & Communiqué**
- 2010: **European Higher Education Area** characterised by
 - system convergence,
 - readable degrees defined in terms of learning outcomes (national qualification frameworks),
 - trustworthy compatible quality assurance,
 - facilitated mobility of students and staff, recognising prior study periods and experience

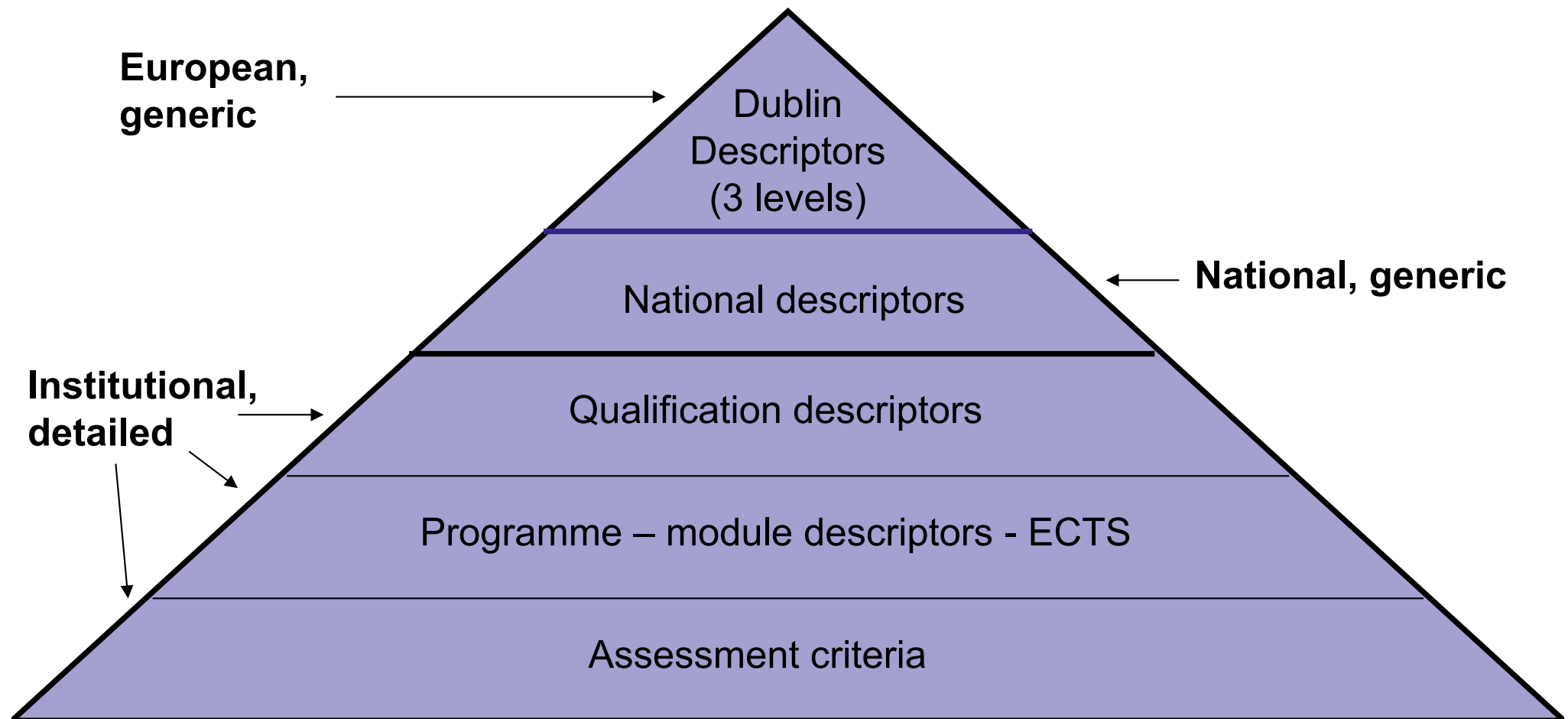
Bologna Action Lines: The Agenda

1. Adoption of a system of **easily readable and comparable degrees**, based on **two cycles**, to be supported by European and National Qualification Frameworks (since 2005)
2. Establishment of a **system of credits (ECTS)**
3. Promotion of **mobility**
4. Promotion of **European co-operation in quality assurance**, 2005: formulation of European standards and guidelines for internal and external QA (for HE institutions and agencies), 2008: launch of European register of recognised QA or accreditation agencies
5. Promotion of the European dimension in higher education
6. Promotion of lifelong learning (since 2001)
7. **Social dimension** of HE (HE as public responsibility, widening access, scholarships) and **student participation**
8. External dimension of Bologna Process
9. **Doctoral studies** (since 2003) linking higher education and research (also part of European research reforms (Lisbon Agenda))

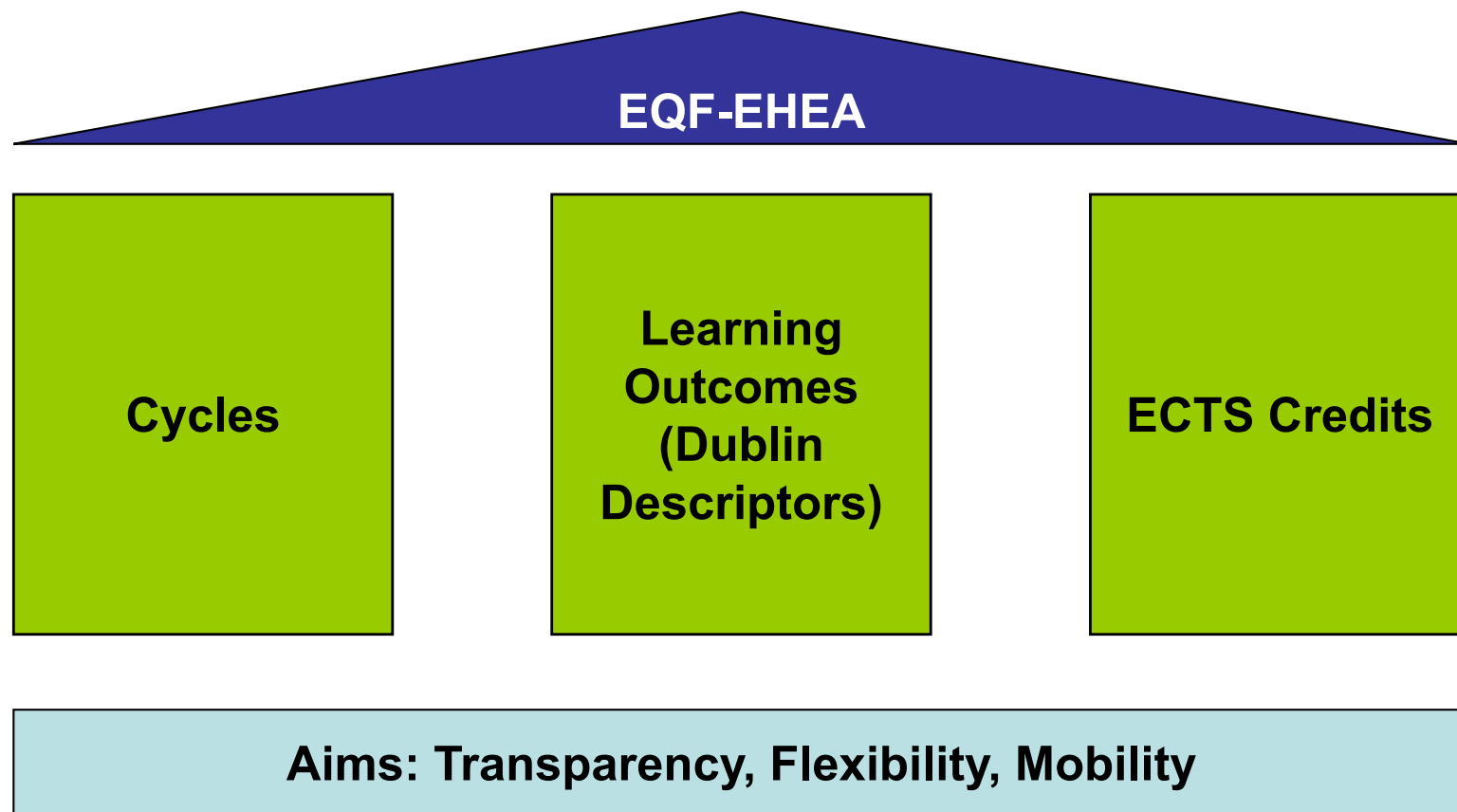
Moving to Student-centered Education and „Flexible Learning Paths“

- Learning outcome descriptions (in terms of knowledge competences and skills) at all levels, from ECTS course descriptions via programme description to national level descriptors
- National and European Qualifications Frameworks
- Reform of teaching methodologies
- Transparent Recognition Procedures (Lisbon Convention)
- More attention to diverse student needs and qualifications in QA processes, incl. student participation in quality assurance and development (European Standards for QA)
- Expansion of student counselling and information support services
- More choices to combine Bachelors and Masters of different orientations (tracks, major/minor combinations)
- Institutional attention to employability at all levels (incl. doctoral)
- Smoother transitions / transparent recognition between institutions of different types
- Expansion of accreditation of prior learning and experience

Different levels for learning outcomes



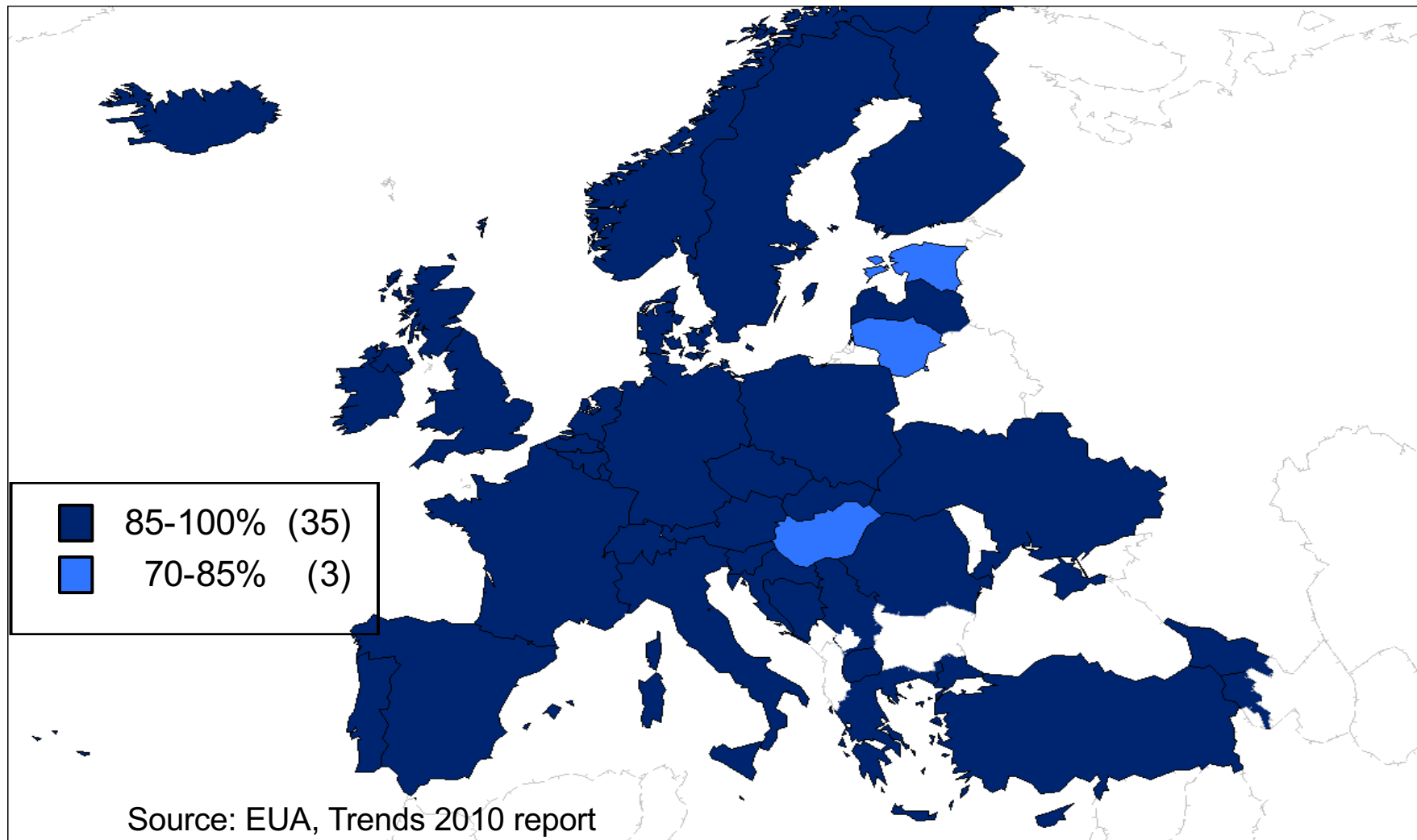
Building Blocks of the European Qualifications Framework for EHEA



Principles of ECTS

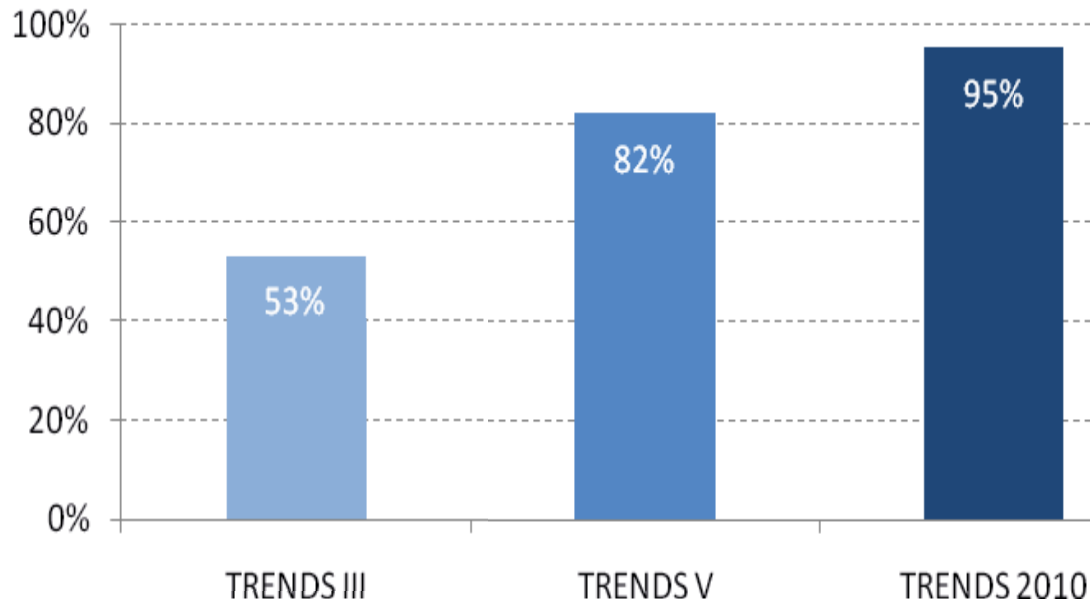
- ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to support institutions in planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility.
- ECTS credits should be based on:
 - Learning outcomes, statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning, defined as a mixture of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and understanding
 - Notional student workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes \neq contact hours, Support tool for curriculum planning

Successful Introduction of 3 Cycle System?

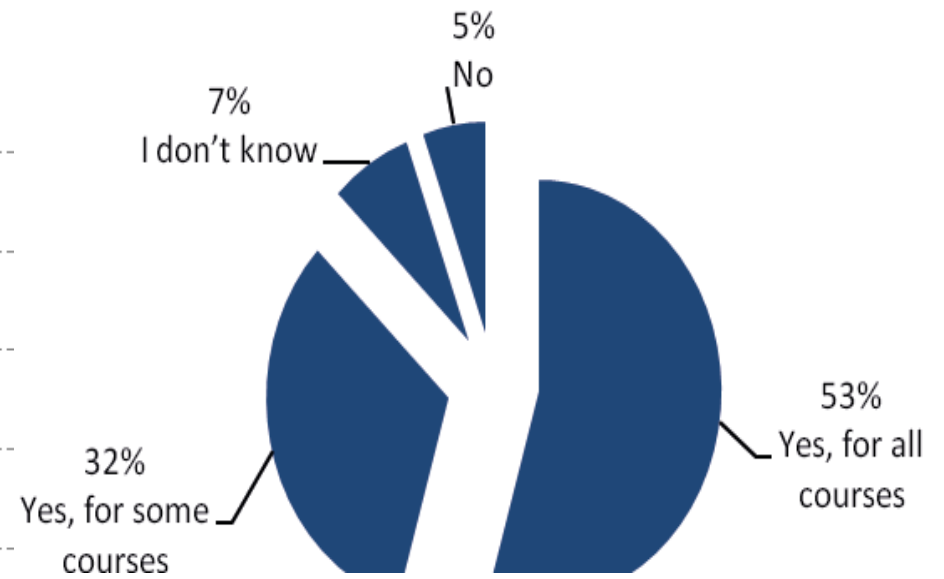


Yes, but the depth of the reforms varies greatly between countries and institutions: student-centered teaching and increased flexibility of learning paths are still lacking and are often being introduced as a second step rather than as a structuring principle of curricular reform!

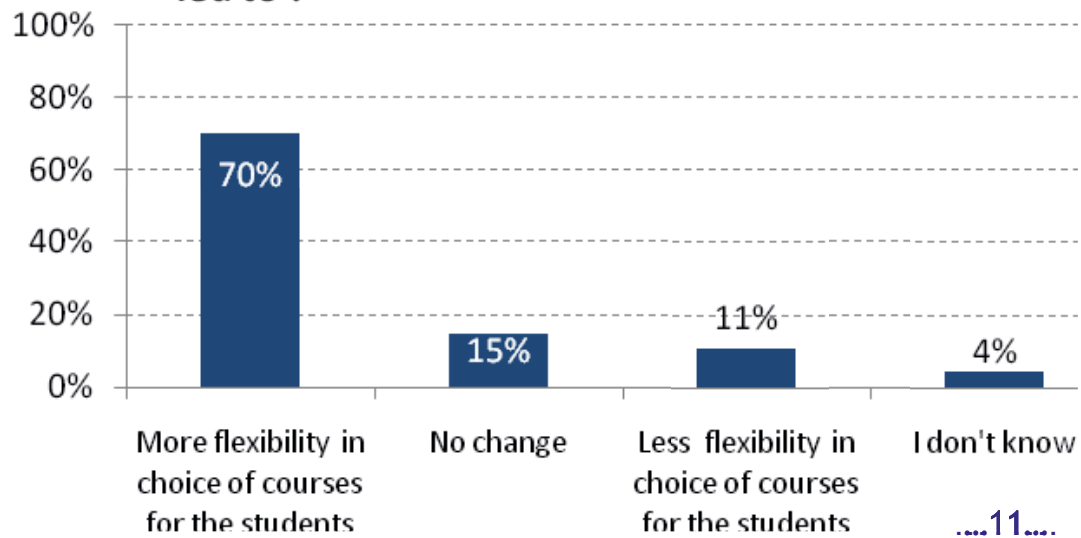
Does your institution have a degree structure based on either two or three main cycles (Bachelor, Master, PhD) in most academic fields?



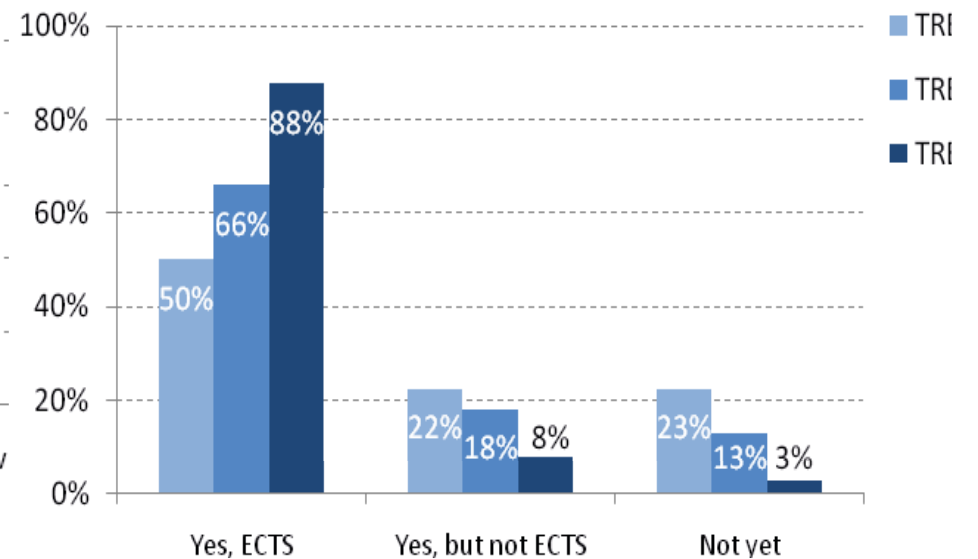
Q19. Have Learning Outcomes been developed?



Q18b. If yes, has the modularisation of courses led to?



Q20. Does your institution use a credit accumulation system for all Bachelor's and Master's programmes?



Important Successes of the Bologna Reforms

- More exchange and dialogue with external stakeholders on expectations and competences needed – attention to employability
- More (but still insufficient) attention to student-centered education, student services, counselling and tutoring opportunities, transition paths between institutions in massified Higher Education
- Greater flexibility of student learning paths
- Strengthened curricular and institutional coherence
- Much more attention to robust internal and external quality assurance, common methodology, incl. more international benchmarking of institutional offer and developments
- Greater institutional autonomy in many European countries – governance reforms
- More institutional “positioning” through internationally attractive master programmes and graduate schools

Opportunities for the US

- More / longer experience with student-centered teaching and learning (no mentality change needed) and with definition of learning outcomes
- Culture/heritage of flexibility, positive encouragement and upward social mobility: Long tradition of facilitating transitions wherever personal motivation and achievements could be found
 - ⇒ Easier to develop appropriate assessment and recognition methods
 - ⇒ Easier to develop meaningful and reliable competence profiles of programmes
 - ⇒ Easier communication between institutions across the country (common language, common heritage)
 - ⇒ Easier to develop modalities which facilitate mobility between programmes, institutions, states, incl. mutual recognition and qualifications frameworks
 - ⇒ Potential to develop a more permeable socially inclusive system, with more opportunity for upward mobility
- Threat: increasing financial and social stratification and acceptance thereof?