

The Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Space

Follow-up report on developments in Germany

24 November 2000

prepared jointly by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK), the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Association of Universities and Other Higher Education Institutions in Germany (HRK)

I. Introductory remarks

The declaration on the "European Higher Education Area"¹, signed jointly by 29 European Ministers of Education on 19 June 1999 in Bologna lists the main objectives that the Ministers consider essential for the creation of a European Higher Education Area and for the promotion of European higher education worldwide. At present the signatory states to the Bologna Declaration are preparing reports on the national implementation of the Bologna process with a view to the forthcoming follow-up conference to that of Bologna, scheduled for 16/17 May 2001 in Prague. More than a dozen country reports have already been presented.²

In addition, many signatory states are organizing conferences, seminars etc. on the content of the declaration. The national higher education reforms have undeniably gained additional momentum by the Bologna Declaration. The national rectors' conferences, in the German case the HRK, are actively supporting this process.

The Council of Europe as well as several countries of South Eastern Europe have joined the process as observers. Also European students' associations have begun to discuss the topic intensively. The "National Unions of Students in Europe" (ESIB) have created a special website for "the way to Prague" and the forthcoming conference that also lists all available country reports.

Finally, the European process of convergence has attracted the attention of governments and higher education institutions worldwide. First contacts in this regard have been established between European universities and the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP), higher education institutions in Latin America and the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

II. The situation in Germany

The objectives of the Bologna Declaration are largely in agreement with the aims of higher education reform as defined over the last years by HRK and the federal and state governments. The following documents may serve as reference in this regard:

- Joint report of the federal and state governments on "Increasing the international competitiveness of German higher education", 16 December 1999
- Recommendation by HRK on the introduction of Master and Bachelor degrees, 11 November 1997

The different aspects of the Bologna Declaration:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement

The federal and state governments in their report on "Increasing the international competitiveness of German higher education" have pointed out that the introduction of the new degree system with

¹ See homepage of the Association of European Universities, CRE: www.unige.ch/cre/. Official publication in German: Bundesanzeiger, Jg. 52 Nr. 185, Sept. 29, 2000, page 19 446 (ISSN: 0344-7634)

² Country reports: See homepage of the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB): www.esib.org/prague

Bachelor/*Bakkalaureus*- and Master/*Magister*-degrees (cf. paragraph 2) requires careful testing, particularly with regard to the acceptance of the new degrees by the labour market. For some time to come the traditional German degrees *Diplom*, *Magister* and *Staatsexamen* will remain the standard final degrees of a study programme in Germany, despite their limited international compatibility. This is why, from the German perspective, the introduction of a standardized Diploma Supplement, recognized all over Europe and containing detailed explanations on the respective degree, is of paramount importance. On the basis of the report of a joint working group of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES the HRK, in cooperation with the 16 states, developed a *Diploma Supplement Deutschland* template. The template is accessible to all higher education institutions via internet.³ So far some 170 institutions have made use of this offer. The federal and state governments hope for the European version of the Diploma Supplement to be available soon, as this will increase the level of information on degrees obtained abroad and thereby improve their acceptance on the domestic labour market.

Moreover, the universities and the state governments are striving for a structural reform also of the traditional degree programmes leading to a *Diplom*, *Magister* or *Staatsexamen*, so as to increase their international compatibility.

2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles

The amendment of the German Higher Education Framework Act of 20 August 1998⁴ allows the introduction of a new two-cycles degree system, alongside the traditional one-cycle system. The stipulations of the Federal Framework Act have meanwhile been incorporated into all state higher education acts. This complies with the objective of the Bologna Declaration for a differentiation into two cycles with a first degree (undergraduate studies) and a second degree (graduate studies). With its decision of 5 March 1999 the KMK specified the new degree system in more detail.⁵ In particular the KMK stressed the relevance to the labour market as an indispensable element of the first degree – a view which was shared by the German Employers' Association in their "Cologne Declaration on the development of Bachelor and Master study programmes" of October 1999. The duration of study towards the first degree was already defined in the Higher Education Framework Act, in accordance with the Bologna Declaration, by a minimum of three and a maximum of four years. Meanwhile more than 450 new study programmes of the Bachelor/Master-type have either already started or are under preparation.

The official statistics for the winter semester 1999/2000 list for the first time students registered in the new Bachelor and Master programmes: 4122 Bachelor students and 2580 Master students. The relatively small numbers show that these programmes are still very new and in the implementation phase. A significant increase of student numbers is expected for the coming years.

The international orientation of the new degree system is supported by special programmes, in particular

- the programme "Internationally oriented study programmes" with a budget of 65 millions DM and a duration until 2003 (supporting at present 42 study programmes)
- the programme "Master-Plus", designed to help foreign holders of a first higher education degree to enter the German higher education system
- the support measures in the framework of the follow-up programmes to the "*Hochschulsonderprogramm III*".

In addition, the German Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) has presented recommendations on the introduction of new study programmes and degrees.

The introduction of the new system of programmes and degrees confronts the German universities with new challenges. In combination with a need for quality assurance and reliable orientation, both for students and employers, this has led to the setting-up of accreditation procedures for Bachelor and

³ See homepage of the HRK under www.hrk.de

⁴ See homepage of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) under www.bmbf.de

⁵ See homepage of the KMK under www.kmk.org

Master programmes. By decision of the KMK a nationwide accreditation council was set up, with a permanent secretariat attached to the HRK⁶. Its tasks are

- to coordinate the assessment procedures for the study programmes to be accredited and to accredit on a time-limited basis the agencies that are commissioned to carry out the assessment (accredited agencies are entitled to award the certificate of the Accreditation Council)
- to assure the fairness and transparency of the assessment regulations.

In assessing the study programmes, the Accreditation Council relies, wherever this is possible, on regional and international evaluation and accreditation agencies with a good reputation in the academic and professional world. The Accreditation Council has decided minimum standards and criteria for the accreditation.

In order to secure sufficient recognition for the new degrees on the labour market, the KMK defined its position regarding the eligibility of holders of a Bachelor's or Master's degree for the careers in the public service. On 14 April 2000 the KMK furthermore adopted a decision on the access to doctoral studies for Bachelors and Masters.

The introduction of the new degree system is accompanied by a large number of conferences, symposia and other information events. The well-documented conferences on the introduction of the new degrees in specific disciplines, organized jointly by the HRK and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), should be especially mentioned in this context.

3. Credit Point Systems and Modularization

Germany has substantially contributed to the implementation of a Europe-wide credit system by the participation of German universities in the large-scale pilot project of the European Union to develop a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) as part of the EU-mobility programme ERASMUS. More and more state higher education acts provide for the application of credit systems and the modularization of study programmes (cf. article 15, paragraph 3 of the Federal Higher Education Framework Act). The KMK's decision of 5 March 1999 stipulates that the approval of new Bachelor/Master-programmes be conditional upon the application of modularisation and credits. The Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies have adopted the same principle.

Already in its first follow-up report on how to increase the international attractiveness of German higher education of December 1997 the KMK has clearly advocated the use of ECTS as credit system. The KMK is also in favour of widening the use of credits towards an accumulation system for examination results.

The federal and the state governments have already in 1998 launched a pilot project on modularization which should lead to a more precise definition of the structural and curricular requirements for modularization. The governments have approved the interim report of the programme coordinator on the first phase of the programme on 30 October.

The KMK has decided on framework regulations for the introduction of credit systems and modularisation. This will provide a nation-wide basis for the various concepts of credit systems and modularization, thus assuring the homogeneity necessary for the mobility of students among universities and also among the 16 states. The HRK, in a decision taken on 4 July 2000, called for the further implementation of ECTS in German universities. Both KMK and HRK have agreed on a conversion table for the German and the ECTS grading scale, which has already been incorporated by some universities into their examination regulations.

The large majority of German universities is today working with ECTS on varying levels of intensity, from the experimental introduction in single programmes or the application for foreign students only to the compulsory and full-scale use in all departments.

4. Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement

⁶ www.akkreditierungsrat.de

With a view to further internationalise German higher education, the legal provisions regarding immigration and work permits for study and research in Germany have been reformulated and considerably improved in 1998. The more liberal regulations for foreign students and academics concern in particular

- the maximum duration of stay
- the pursuance of post-graduate, complementary or doctoral studies or internships necessary for the recognition of a particular education
- less rigid demands regarding proof of sufficient financial means to finance the stay in Germany
- more possibilities to secure the necessary financial means by gainful employment, especially for students (jobs)
- improvements regarding the possibility of family members to join their relative in Germany.

In addition, considerable efforts have been made to induce the immigration offices to apply friendlier and more customer-oriented procedures. The striving for a more university-friendly interpretation of the regulations on residence and work permits will be continued. An explicit re-orientation of the legal regulations and the administrative procedures towards attracting more foreign students and academics is required.

According to the KMK-decision of 25 May 2000 study in Germany will remain free of tuition fees up to the first degree, in the case of consecutive programmes up to the second degree. This applies also to foreign students. Moreover the state governments and the universities are striving to improve the social and academic tutoring of foreign students. In July 2000 the HRK has passed recommendations to the heads of universities and departments to this end, specifying the requirements for the university as host to foreign students and academics.

Also an increasing number of study programmes taught in English is contributing to an easier integration of foreign students into the German system. Special attention is paid to the improvement of the linguistic preparation of foreign applicants. Thus the introduction of the new Test of German as a foreign language (TestDaF), comparable to the internationally known and successful TOEFL for the English language, will allow a differentiated assessment of language skills, according to the requirements of the study programme in question.

The KMK has stated the equivalence of TestDaF (level III) with the *Deutsches Sprachdiplom* of the KMK (level II). The HRK has included TestDaF into the list of examinations exempting from the German language proficiency examination for higher education admission of foreign applicants (DSH) and has left it to the discretion of universities to make use of TestDaF-results in the assessment of language proficiency.

5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance

In parallel to the quality management of the individual university, the system of nation-wide quality assurance in Germany is increasingly taking shape. Consortia of universities, sometimes including foreign institutions, and central agencies responsible for the universities of one particular state, have established themselves as accreditation agencies or are about to do so. As part of the introduction of the new degree system KMK and HRK have introduced an accreditation system with an accreditation council on the national level. The German Science Council advocates the institutional accreditation of new private providers of higher education. The project "Quality in teaching", financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and carried out by the HRK, promotes the exchange of information and experience in quality assurance among the states and the universities, respectively.⁷ The federal and the state governments and the HRK make sure that the emerging national system of quality assurance in Germany is from the start integrated into the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (enqa). The major accreditation agencies are members of enqa. In accordance with the BMBF and the HRK the KMK is supporting a decisive role for Germany in enqa and has defined the framework conditions for German participation. For enqa's second term of office Germany is aspiring to place a German agency in the steering group of enqa.

⁷ For more information see: www.hrk.de

6. Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education

The European dimension in curricular development, university cooperation, mobility projects and integrated programmes for study, training and research is taken into account by German universities in many regards. According to a survey carried out by the representation of the European Commission in Germany, already in 1996 there were 135 study programmes, 24 graduate schools and 688 projects in research and teaching with specific European relevance. Also the close Franco-German cooperation with integrated study programmes leading to a double degree and the jointly supervised doctoral theses (Cotutelle de thèse), culminating in the founding of the Franco-German university in March 2000, deserve mentioning. A new programme, financed by the BMBF and administered by the DAAD, supports the creation of integrated study programmes also with other European countries.

Within the special programme "*Hochschulsonderprogramm III*" "activities of European relevance" and "European Guest Houses" have received 285 millions DM in support between 1996 and 2000.

Also the creation of European graduate schools by the German Research Foundation (DFG) places special emphasis on the European dimension in the training of young researchers. Given the still negative exchange balance for Germany in the European mobility programmes, the efforts to attract highly qualified young scientists from abroad will be further intensified.

The Council of the European Union is currently discussing the proposal for a joint recommendation by the Council and the European Parliament on the mobility of students, trainees, young volunteers, teachers and trainers in the European Union⁸

The French presidency in the second half of 2000 has presented an elaborate "action plan mobility", aiming at improving the preparation and facilitating the financing of mobility measures and at a better evaluation of mobility experiences. These contents and the problems of financing these measures are currently being debated in the framework of European education cooperation, with a view to adopting them at the meeting of the European Council of Education ministers on 9 November 2000.

⁸ Inter-institutional dossier 200/0021 (COD), Brussels, 23 June 2000