

# Qualitative Aspects of Transnational Mobility in Co-operations with Nordic and Baltic Countries

**Brücken für Bildung**



**DAAD**

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst  
German Academic Exchange Service



# **Qualitative Aspects of Transnational Mobility in Co-operations with Nordic and Baltic Countries**

**DAAD**

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst  
German Academic Exchange Service

**Publisher DAAD**

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
German Academic Exchange Service  
Kennedyallee 50, 53175 Bonn (Germany)  
National Agency for  
EU Higher Education Cooperation

**Project Coordination** Dr. Siegbert Wuttig, Marina Steinmann

**Printed by** Gebr. Molberg GmbH Bonn

**Print run** February 2008 – 1000

© DAAD

Any reproduction, even of extracts, only with appropriate source details.

This publication was funded by the European Commission and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The publication reflects only the views of the authors.



Federal Ministry  
of Education  
and Research



Education and Culture DG

# Content

<b>Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Finland</b>	7
<i>Professor Riitta Pyykkö, University of Turku, Member of FINHEEC (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council)</i>	

## **The role of ECTS in Quality Assurance of Transnational Mobility**

<b>ECTS in Danish Higher Education</b>	13
<i>Anne-Kathrine Mandrup, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Denmark</i>	

<b>Quality in Transnational Mobility – with special regards to ECTS</b>	15
<i>Kirsten Marie Kristensen, Susanne Suhr, Danish Bologna Experts and Christiane Mißlbeck-Winberg, Cirius, Denmark</i>	

<b>Observations of a German Bologna Expert</b>	17
<i>Christopher Moss, University of Marburg, German Bologna Expert</i>	

<b>The Bologna Process: Removing the Barriers to Recognition of Study Periods</b>	21
<i>Jolita Butkienė, ISM University of Management and Economics, Lithuanian Bologna Expert Nora Skaburskiene, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania</i>	

## Examples of practice

### **Our Experience with the Cooperation in Higher Education in the Baltic Countries** 27

*Prof. Dr.-Ing. Hans-Dieter Liess, University of the Bundeswehr Munich, Neubiberg, Germany*

### **Our Cooperation between the University of Marburg, Faculty of Education and Åbo Akademi, Vaasa, Finland** 32

*Sabine Lauber, University of Marburg, Germany*

### **Dialogue Based on a Common Academic and Regional Interest** 37

*Tarja Hyppönen, University of Turku, Finland*

*Katrin Hecker, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany*

## The students' perspective

### **A Student Perspective on Transnational Mobility and ECTS** 41

*Henrik Thorn, The National Union of Students in Denmark*

### **"Throw Your Students Out!" –**

### **How to Encourage Transnational Student Mobility?** 45

*Juhana Harju, Educational Officer, National Union of University Students in Finland*

### **Student Mobility and ECTS – What is the Role of Quality Assurance?** 49

*Ulf Banscherus, former student member of German Accreditation Council*

### **Bilateral Cooperation: Quality and ECTS in Transnational Mobility** 53

*Asta Janonyte, Lithuanian National Union of Students*

### **Conclusions** 57

*Dr. Birger Hendriks, Ministry of Science, Economics and Transport*

*of Land Schleswig-Holstein, Bologna Representative of the KMK, Germany*

## Introduction

*Marina Steinmann and Dr. Siegbert Wuttig,  
German Academic Exchange Service*

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) – launched in 1989 under the ERASMUS programme and therefore older than the Bologna process – has developed from a mere tool for recognition of study abroad periods to a system of accumulation. It became one of the pillars of the Bologna process and an important element in national and European reforms contributing substantially to improving student mobility.

Enhancing student mobility is one of the main aims of the Bologna process. Transnational experiences are crucial to acquire competences for an increasingly internationalising labour market. Recognition of study abroad results is essential, but there is also a need for favourable structural conditions like flexible programmes and modules which allow to find individual pathways and focused bilateral or multilateral co-operation of higher education institutions. Successful recognition and co-operation must be based on trust in the quality of institutions and their programmes.

Unified as regards the necessity of ECTS for the European Higher Education Area, the many national or even regional ways of using it stress the importance of identification of examples of good practice and dialogue. In Germany, for example, quality assurance is linked to accreditation of Bachelor and Master programmes and use of ECTS is required for accreditation. The DAAD in various conferences stressed the importance of using ECTS for quality assurance in multilateral or bilateral study programmes. Quality in higher education depends on common standards and instruments but needs trust and flexibility in the details.

This publication reflects findings related to co-operations of German higher education institutions with Nordic and Baltic countries. The authors – students, teachers, politicians and Bologna experts – discuss elements of quality and its relation to ECTS from various perspectives. They look at bilateral co-operations between Nordic and Baltic countries with Germany but also at international co-operation in the European higher education area in general. The reader will find different ways of dealing with challenges of mobility and quality in the EHEA and hopefully some ideas which are promising to consider for his or her own institution.

Special thanks go to all authors of this publication, to the participants of the DAAD's conferences, as well as to the European Commission and our Federal Ministry of Education and Research for funding our activities.



## Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Finland

*Professor Riitta Pyykkö, University of Turku,  
Member of FINHEEC (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council)*

In Finland the national quality assurance policy in higher education has three components: national policy steering, the institutions' own quality assurance, and national auditing. The higher education system is quite stable: even the youngest research universities are over 30 years old, and the polytechnics were formed 10–15 years ago. All 20 universities are government-run, and there are no private HEIs in the country. Universities are founded by the decision of the Finnish parliament. Finland has a national higher education and innovation policy, and as in other Nordic countries, is considered to be a society of mutual trust, steered by information, not by control.

### **Steering and management of higher education**

Finnish higher education policy is based on a Government Programme and on the Development Plan for Education and Research, which complements it and is reviewed and adopted by the Government every four years. The steering system of higher education in Finland highlights the role of evaluation and the responsibility of the institutions themselves. Important tools in the steering and management of higher education are the performance agreements between the Ministry of Education and each university. These agreements determine quantitative and qualitative targets and the resources needed to achieve these targets, the monitoring and evaluation of outcome, and the further development of operations. Performance agreements are prepared for a three-year period.

In the same way, the university sets target outcomes for its faculties, and the rector's office carries on performance negotiations with faculties.

At the faculty level, the same kind of process is carried on between the Dean and the schools. In these performance negotiations, the universities (correspondingly, faculties and schools) are also given feedback concerning the previous year's performance.

There is a national public database, KOTA, which is maintained by the Ministry of Education. It offers statistical data on universities and fields of education from 1981 onwards in Finnish, Swedish and English. This data is also used for the allocation of resources both from the Ministry of Education to the universities and, inside the universities, to the faculties. Data is collected every year on the number of applicants, the number of admitted new students, students, student mobility, degrees, graduate placement, median graduation times, teachers, other staff, annual accounts, expenditure by performance areas, university premises, teacher and researcher visits, scientific publications, etc. A similar database serves the polytechnics (Amkota).

Universities are by law responsible for the quality of their work: they must evaluate their education, research and other activities and their effectiveness, and take part in external evaluations. According to law, the findings of evaluations must be published. External evaluations of HEIs are primarily the duty of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). FINHEEC is an independent expert body which assists HEIs and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation. The *Decree on the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council* clearly gives it the status of a national quality assurance agency.

Finnish evaluation policy is based on a development and improvement approach, not on control. HEIs are now building quality assurance systems covering all their operations, and they will be audited by FINHEEC. The audits started in 2005, and will cover all universities and polytechnics by the year 2011. A system of audits instead of an accreditation/certification was chosen because we consider it more suitable for the principle of

development-orientation. It also supports the autonomy of HEIs and their diversity. Audit, as a method, is more flexible than accreditation. The Finnish audit model is in line with the *Standards and Guidelines* for QA in the EHEA.

### **The Bologna Process in Finland**

The reform of higher education known as the Bologna process is not the first and definitely not the last reform facing Finnish institutions of higher education. The implementation of the process has, however, been somewhat different from the previous reforms. The situation in Finland was also different from that in many other European countries, since we were already familiar with the two-cycle degree structure (in fact, we adopted the new two-cycle structure on 1 August 2005 exactly 50 years after the first two-tier system took effect in 1955) and a credit system. Since these two central features did not require such a significant change, we were able to utilize the reform process in many other ways.

The Finnish Ministry of Education concentrated on the preparation of the changes required by the *Universities Act* and by the new *Government Decree on University Degrees*, and delegated the practical implementation work to the universities. This division of labour was a natural solution and significantly encouraged the universities to commit themselves to the reform work. In addition, the Ministry allocated project funding for the process. The funding was partly intended for the degree reform itself and partly for the development of university education in general.

The practical implementation was organised in national field-of-study-specific coordination projects. The Ministry named the coordinators, but the coordinators had a free hand to organize their own projects. The projects were of different size, and the operation models of the projects differed from each other. The starting point was the fact that the reform is not

merely structural. In order to be meaningful for those who work and study at the universities, a structural reform requires a reform of contents, and implementing a reform of contents requires pedagogical reform. Since it is impossible to make general recommendations without being familiar with the everyday work at the universities, the task forces of the projects were formed from members with as varied expertise as possible. The functions of the field-specific task forces were, on the one hand, to prepare and formulate the new degree system and, on the other, to support the development of curricula in the faculties.

Thus in Finland the Bologna reform has been a huge challenge and an opportunity for the development of the general formulation of curricula and for reforms that should have been implemented in any case.

### **Starting new education in Finland**

University education in Finland is mainly discipline-based and organised into major subject and minor subject studies. The universities select their own students: student admission is based on prior study attainments (mostly matriculation exams) and various kinds of entrance examinations. New students get the right to take both the first and the second cycle, but they have to apply again for doctoral education.

After a Bachelor's degree, students can take their Master's degree either by continuing their studies in discipline-based Master-level education, or apply for a special Master degree programme. These special programmes have been a part of the new degree system since 2005, and they are organised in cooperation with two or more departments, faculties or institutions, also as international joint degrees. They are mostly thematic, multidisciplinary, and more than half of them are taught in English. Today about 5% of Master level students study in these special degree programmes, but the number is growing.

The procedure for starting new education depends on the form of the degree. The *Government Decree on University Degrees* contains a list of fields of education in the universities, the degree titles and the universities awarding those degrees. The university and faculty have the right to start new education in the fields mentioned on the list. For example, if the faculty has the right to award degrees in History, they can freely start new education in Cultural History or Finnish History. To begin offering education in some new field, the university has to apply to the Ministry for changes in this so-called "educational responsibility". New fields are negotiated in the annual performance negotiations between the Ministry of Education and each university, and the decisions made in a form of an amendment to the Decree, which makes the system quite cumbersome.

In 2004, the *Ministry of Education Decree on Master's Degree Programmes* was adopted, which consists of a list of separate Master's programmes and universities offering those programmes. Starting a separate Master's degree programme is easier than starting a totally new field of education at all levels. The faculty proposes a new programme to the university in the annual internal performance negotiations. The university senate makes a decision to submit it to the Ministry. The experts in the Ministry prepare the decision, and the Ministry gives an amendment to the decree on Master programmes every year. The time it takes from making a proposal at the university level to the new amendment is usually 3-5 months. In the future this will be part of the annual negotiations between the Ministry and each university.

The criteria for starting a new Master's programme, especially an international one, are now better specified than three years ago when the first programmes were started. The new guidelines from August 2007 emphasise that the separate Master's degree programmes have the same academic status as the "mainstream" degrees. They are based on Bache-

lor level education and give eligibility for Doctoral education. The admission criteria and annual intake quota must be clearly determined. The extent of the degree is usually 120 ECTS, but in some international programmes, mostly in the field of economics and business administration, only 90 ECTS. The learning outcomes have to be clearly defined, and there is an emphasis on multidisciplinary and cooperation, which gives them an added value compared with specialization within one discipline. There has to be a clearly defined demand for new education, either from the point of view of the labour market or the development of science. The cooperation partners have to be officially recognised/accredited institutions, the programme must have an evaluation and QA system, and the students need to be represented in the QA system, even in international programmes. The universities are responsible for arranging financing and for its continuity, because the programmes do not usually receive any extra funding from the Ministry.

In practice, the difference in these procedures for starting new education means that there are very few new openings in discipline-based education at the Bachelor's and Master's level, and that the new openings are mostly in a form of a separate Master degree programme. In these programmes there are good chances for success when the curriculum is based on institutional strength and the relevant academic interests of the university and its partners. Then the effect of a multidisciplinary programme is always greater than the sum of its parts.

**Useful addresses:**

[www.finheec.fi/english/](http://www.finheec.fi/english/)

[www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/?lang=en](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/?lang=en)

[www.hum.utu.fi/opiskelu/perustutkinnot/BolognaEngl.pdf](http://www.hum.utu.fi/opiskelu/perustutkinnot/BolognaEngl.pdf)

## ECTS in Danish Higher Education

*Anne-Kathrine Mandrup, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Denmark*

ECTS was introduced in many Danish Higher Institutions on a voluntary basis during the 1990s as a tool for measuring student work load. At the time ECTS was primarily used for credit transfer in relation to student mobility and the ECTS credit system was used as a supplement to a national credit system.

ECTS was introduced as a mandatory credit accumulation system measuring student workload in 2001. Further more the system for financing higher education – the taxameter system - is based on the ECTS system.

A new University Act entered into force in 2003. The University Act uses the ECTS credit system to describe the acquired student work load for the following university programmes:

- A Bachelor programme equals 180 ECTS
- A Master programme equals 120 ECTS
- A Ph.D. programme equals 180 ECTS.

In Denmark one academic year or 60 ECTS credits require an average of 1650 working hours. One ECTS credit point thus corresponds to between 27 and 28 hours of student work.

### **ECTS in relation to accreditation and Qualification Frameworks**

A first Danish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education was introduced in 2003. The framework introduced programme descriptors defining higher education programmes in terms of learning outcomes. Each programme descriptor was linked to the stipulated number of ECTS credit points for each programme. A revised Qualifications Framework which is

compatible with the two European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF and the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area) will be introduced in late 2007. The new framework also stipulates the expected generic learning outcomes of each programme and the number of ECTS credits required for each programme.

With the new Act on Accreditation (March 2007) all higher education programmes – new and existing ones - must be accredited on a regular basis. The accreditation system is being implemented for university programmes in 2007 and for other higher education programmes during 2008.

ECTS is included as a criterion for accreditation of university programmes. In order to get a programme accredited, the university must document that the programme in question – that is the expected learning outcome of the programme - can be obtained within the required number of ECTS credits.



## Quality in Transnational Mobility – with special regards to ECTS

*Kirsten Marie Kristensen, Susanne Suhr, Danish Bologna Experts and  
Christiane Mißbeck-Winberg, Cirus, Denmark*

Student mobility has changed character throughout the past. What in former times was a journey to broaden aspiring young men's intellectual horizon and expose them to cultural formation, has now become an educational journey with a predominant focus on quality and academic recognition. Studying abroad must not prolong your studies at home.

In other words, the student and both the sending and the host institutions must make credit transfer possible by ensuring a comparability of courses. Without the academic cohesion between two institutions' curricula and a thorough description of quality, level, content and learning outcomes of the respective courses and modules in the course catalogues, student mobility can be a tedious affair. And the non-transfer of credits can become an unwelcome surprise for the student on returning to his home university. Therefore, ECTS key documents are useful and important tools in the enhancement of student mobility.

Denmark signed the Bologna declaration in 1999 and thereby committed itself to the implementation of tools that enable credit transfer. Since 2001 and 2002 respectively, the use of ECTS and Diploma Supplement is obligatory for all Danish institutions of higher education. Students who feel treated unjustly by institutions' decision on credit transfer or on pre-approval of credit transfer, have the possibility to appeal against these decisions to a recently established Qualifications Board.

Seen from a Danish perspective and in the light of these regulations implemented on a national basis, it is crucial to have a common under-

standing of what ECTS is. A common understanding of the key principles of ECTS and a common respect for the key principles is essential. And only a close collaboration between partner institutions can bring about and ensure a common understanding and common practical application of ECTS. The accuracy and transparency of the information given in an institution's Course Catalogue is immensely important, as the student's choice of courses is based on this information. Choosing the wrong courses can easily become a major problem for a sober credit transfer on a student's return to the home institution.

Danish institutions are in a process where strategic alliances with a few, selected partners replace large numbers of bilateral agreements. Strategic alliances are entered into because the partners have other collaboration activities besides student and staff mobility, because they have well-functioning relations within the field of procedures, monitoring and evaluation, because they know each other's curricula and courses where mobility is a possibility, and lastly, because they have balance in mobility.

But whether a Danish institution of higher education has only few strategic alliances or a whole range of bilateral agreements, most of them agree that quality of mobility is more important than quantity and that a correct use of ECTS is a *sine qua non* for high quality in mobility.

## Observations of a German Bologna Expert

*Christopher Moss, University of Marburg, Germany*

The conference in Hamburg dealt specifically with transnational mobility the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, but much of what will be said here is true of other mobilities.

The major issues that have to be addressed in context of ECTS and quality are:

- the fields of study covered by co-operation agreements,
- the level of study (i.e. First cycle (Bachelor), Second Cycle (Master) or Third Cycle (Doctoral),
- recognition – correct use of ECTS tools
- output orientated teaching
- hard skills versus soft skills
- quality assurance
- employability
- confidence building.

The co-operations presented during the workshop were, of course, success stories – but this does not mean that there are not problems which need to be addressed. Probably the most debated issue is that of recognition, which involves many of the issues mentioned above. Without mutual trust – there can be no recognition, but in mutual trust means there have to be confidence building measures. The significance of partners knowing each other, being open with each other and having open communications channels is vital to the success of mobility.

Recognition means a change of approach for most German Higher Education Institutions: we need to get away from the “What does a student know” approach to the “What skills does a student have”. Many

paths lead to the same result – which should make recognition easy, but there is still a tendency in Germany to look for courses – rather than modules which have the same content, same examinations forms etc. This results in a low level of recognition. The answer lies in finding comparable modules with the same learning outcomes.

Recognition must also be documented. There is still the need for the ECTS tools – such as learning agreements, transcripts of records, module descriptions. The use of these tools varies tremendously from institution to institution and is clear that a lot of work still needs to be done in this field. There is a danger of this being seen as over bureaucratisation rather than a tool to make courses of study “readable” to all stakeholders – students, teachers, registrars and future employers alike. We often think we are speaking the same language but then find that we may not really mean the same thing when we talk about “Bachelors” or “Masters”.

The question of what is a “Bachelor” and what is a “Master” is usually defined in terms of ECTS e.g. 180 – 240 or 60 – 120 or in terms of years, e.g. 3+2 or 4+1.

This raises the issue of finding the ideal slot for student mobility – a Bachelor's level or at Master's level. Mobility can also be a tool for recruitment: Bachelor at one institution, but Master's at a partner institution. This can be problematic if a student does a 180 credit Bachelor's degree and moves on to do a 60 credit Master's degree.

The formal questions raised here can be partially answered by using a skills-based description for each degree course.

Another important issue is the question of bi-directional mobility. Generally, more students come to Germany than go from Germany to partner countries. Where students go from Germany, it is in many cases, because higher education in the Baltic and Scandinavian countries offer a high proportion of courses taught in English, so that there is a danger of

these programmes being used as a kind of substitute for studying in the UK. Added to this are external factors, such as accommodation, mentoring and intercultural competence. An important message is that student mobility should not be seen too rigidly. Ideally, partner institutions should know each other's teaching programmes and have identified suitable modules on either side. The "living abroad" experience is then an additional bonus. However, many study programmes envisage a slot for soft skills. This includes language learning, intercultural experience, but also learning new laboratory or IT skills. One of the benefits of student mobility is employability: whereas most graduates speak English and possibly have experience in the UK or the USA, far fewer will have intimate knowledge of Scandinavia or the Baltic States – let alone the accompanying linguistic skills. These skills can be defined in a learning agreement and clearly documented.

Through student mobility, higher education institutions can learn from each other: the approach to doctoral studies is a case in point – should there be structured or individual programmes – if mobility is a factor how should ECTS be applied? This is an example of cross-border European development which needs to be further pursued. We can learn from each other in all subject areas: it is generally assumed that the humanities are particularly suited to student mobility, because of different approaches, content and skills. However, engineering and natural science fields can benefit just as much. While it can be assumed that a German and a Lithuanian chemist should have the same skills, the approach to acquiring these skills can be very different and this can be a catalyser for new methods.

The fact that many different actors are involved in student mobility means that the process must be kept transparent: clear procedures, accessible documentation and common standards are required – and

quite simply, promises must be kept. This should lead to a process of both internal and external evaluation, which needs in turn to be a dynamic process. As much of what matters in the case of transnational mobility applies equally within the institution (e.g. documentation, output based, student centred learning), “getting it right” here is a useful tool for accreditation processes.

The message is: have clear standards – but be flexible and encourage mobility. Use mobility as a tool to benefit procedures within the institution – and most of all, keep talking to your partners.

## The Bologna Process: Removing the Barriers to Recognition of Study Periods

*Jolita Butkien, ISM University of Management and Economics,  
Lithuanian Bologna Expert*

*Nora Skaburskiene, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education,  
Lithuania*

### Introduction

Increasing processes of integration and globalization in the world raise the demand for internationalization of studies, thus changing parameters of higher education activity.

Student mobility and accompanying academic recognition of a study period remains one of the most important issues in the Bologna process. The rising numbers of mobile students within the EU higher education institutions prove that mobility is understood as "... beneficial for the mobile individual, but also for students and staff at the home institution. Mobility also has positive consequences for the quality of higher education and the higher education institutions as well as for society as a whole.

To experience another country and study environment gives the individual a new cultural, social and academic experience and creates opportunities for personal growth." (Report from the Bologna working group on social dimension and data on mobility of Staff, 2007).

That is why a challenging target - three million mobile students in 2010 was communicated from the Commission. However, not only quantitative goals are important, quality issues of student mobility are revisited at the institutional, national and international levels.

How much students will gain from the mobility depends on the sending and receiving higher education institution's mobility culture, which should be perceived as the openness of the whole academic community to the

international academic values, differences in educational systems, teaching and learning practices and, evidence of the effective functioning of formal mobility structures with clearly defined responsibilities, tools to administrate mobility activities and mechanisms to disseminate good practice and to monitor the qualitative and quantitative mobility aspects.

The report "Bologna with students eyes" (2007) and the results of 2007 Stocktaking revealed that still there is much to be done to remove the barriers to mobility, especially in the area of recognition practices of degrees and credits. In this paper we will limit ourselves only to the recognition issues in horizontal student mobility.

### **Quality Assurance of mobility**

The quality assurance of the learning process in a mobility process has two dimensions. One is concerned with the individual participant and the pre-conditions for a successful stay, the other with the actual learning process itself. The personal aspects of the issue of quality assurance deals with the problems of ensuring that a participant is properly motivated, selected, and prepared for the studies abroad. Preparation is a more complex procedure which can be broken up into five basic components:

- linguistic preparation;
- cultural preparation;
- content preparation (differences and similarities between courses in home and host institution);
- practical preparation (social security, accommodation, dealing with authorities etc.);
- personal (or psychological) preparation.

The personal psychological preparation is intended to help the participant cope with the crises that are experienced by nearly all participants in



transnational mobility projects: feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, homesickness etc.

Quality assurance of the learning process is a more complicated task.

Improving information and its communication within the context of student mobility is an important factor to the quality of student mobility and recognition.

Institutions should ensure that:

- **any available information should be easily accessible** (e.g. ECTS Information package and Course Catalogue, information on accommodation and any other everyday issues, information on the selection procedure for the outgoing students, regulations on the recognition of the study period).
- **the quality of information is fit for its purpose** (e.g. updated, consistent, accurate). It is important that the course offerings are revised and updated on a regular basis. Of course some flexibility should be allowed; however, it often happens that upon arrival at a host institution students find out that the courses they have signed up for are not on offer. A repeated course selection procedure, communication with the home institution, amending of the Learning Agreement and signing it only at the end of the mobility period might de-motivate students and raise doubts about the receiving institution's quality of education.

It should be noted that not all course descriptions provide learning outcomes, furthermore often the information on the course profile and level is also missing. The information on the course profile is extremely important to the second cycle mobile students, as Master programmes in the member states differ in their profile (e.g. professional, academic, deepening, widening, etc.).

It also important to make sure that the period of student mobility is constructed following academic logic, which means that students build upon previously acquired level of knowledge and skills. If the level of the course is not indicated in the course descriptions, students either select courses that are too low and not academically challenging, or struggle hard to complete the course successfully but do not benefit to the full extent.

- **staff take on responsibility to provide information to the incoming students** questions rather than direct them elsewhere. The students who have had less exposure to international contexts might need some counselling from the host institution prior to their arrival and during their stay and have to be sure that all the necessary information will be provided by a responsible person.

## ECTS

The key role in quality assurance of the learning process is played by ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) - a student-centered system that is based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme of study. These objectives should preferably be specified in terms of learning outcomes and the competences to be acquired.

In Lithuania the volume of studies is measured in national credits (one national credit equals 1,5 ECTS credit) which are fully compatible with ECTS. One national credit corresponds to 40 relative hours of student work. The national credit transfer system is used for credit accumulation and transfer, ECTS credits in Lithuania are used for credit transfer only.

In 2007 the rectors of universities in Lithuania have recognized the importance of ECTS, especially in relation to transnational mobility. A planned new Law on Science and Education introduces ECTS as the only credit system in Lithuania.

## Learning Agreement

Recognition of the study period starts with the signing of the Learning agreement.

Institutional attitudes play a vital role in selecting the courses to be studied in a partner institution. It should be noted that not a detailed comparison, overlap of the content of the courses but rather comparability should be the guiding principle in approving a Learning Agreement. Of course, the level and the learning outcomes of the courses chosen by the student should satisfy the programme requirements.

Problems occur when a Learning Agreement has to be amended, as discussed in the chapter above. It sometimes happens that due to the changes in the programme of study in the receiving institution, students are not able to collect the number of credits agreed in the initial version of the Learning Agreement, which means that students will have to make up for the credit points missing when back at the home institution, and will have to invest extra time and effort, which would even require the extension of their study period.

Timely signed Learning Agreements spare students from the anxiety about recognition of the credits for the successfully completed courses; sending institutions have a guarantee that courses studied abroad will meet learning outcomes of the home programme.

## ECTS Transcript of Records

ECTS Transcript of Records is a document used to document students' performance by listing the courses studied, credits acquired, and grades awarded – local and corresponding to ECTS. The following main problems are encountered while using this mobility tool:

1. Some host institutions issue Transcripts of Records in their own language leaving the home institution to find their own ways to translate and interpret the information on the transcript.

2. Grading systems vary according to host institutions, which makes it difficult to transfer study results. If the host country and home institution do not provide statistical data on student performance, which is a prerequisite for applying the ECTS grading system, fair recognition is not possible.
3. Late receipt of the Transcript of Records may cause a lot of problems to the student and administration: students do not have a formal confirmation of the completion (or sometimes non-completion) of the mobility period, administrations cannot document this period in their data bases.
4. Mobility periods are not always made explicit in the Diploma Supplement: the courses taken at the host institution are not listed with original titles and credits.

### **Conclusions**

Transnational mobility is becoming a substantial part of studies, so it is important to make it meaningful, reliable, accredited and valid. Academic recognition should not be questioned if all the ECTS tools have been implemented in a fair and transparent way. Of course it is the responsibility of the two – the home and the host institution.

### **References:**

Report from the Bologna working group on social dimension and data on mobility of Staff and students in participating countries (2007). Key issues for the European higher education area – Social dimension and mobility. Government offices of Sweden. Last accessed 2 November, 2007.

ESIB (2007). Bologna with student eyes. London, UK

Report from the working group appointed by the Bologna Follow up group to the Ministerial Conference in London (2007). Bologna process. Stock Taking Report 2007. Department for education and skills. Last accessed 4 November, 2007.

Project of a new Law on Science and Studies of Lithuanian Republic, November, 2007.

## **Our Experience with Cooperation in Higher Education in the Baltic Countries**

*Prof. Dr.-Ing. Hans-Dieter Liess, University of the Bundeswehr Munich, Neubiberg, Germany*

### **Introduction**

The University of the Bundeswehr Munich (UniBwM) is an institution of higher education like any German University, with the only difference that the students are soldiers who in parallel will become officers during their study period. An exchange of students with foreign countries was not envisaged and not considered necessary during the cold war period when the university was founded. There were already since a long time Governmental agreements with several countries with the aim of accepting a number of their students to fully join the education system of the UniBwM with the result of also receiving a final degree from this institution. Also Baltic students took advantage of this possibility after their countries became independent.

The only way to bypass this system was that professors offered foreign students to join their research activities and to present a successfully finalised research project to their home university. This required only the agreement of both professors at the two participating universities, which was especially practised with French Grandes Ecoles since the 80s and was very popular in both directions. It seems that the experience of this first exchange procedure for a project or a diploma thesis (fin de thèse) was an important milestone for present student exchange rules.

### **Activities with the Baltic countries**

The University of the Bundeswehr Munich (UniBwM) has since many years had intensive contacts to several universities of the Baltic countries. The

systematic development of the cooperation became active with the visit to Lithuania of a small group of professors from the UniBwM in April 2000. During that visit the research activities and the student exchange possibilities of or university were presented to the technical and the general universities of Vilnius and Kaunas and two colleges of technology in Vilnius. During the following years the universities of Klaipeda (Lithuania), Riga (Latvia) and Tallinn (Estonia) were included in this activity.

Already since the first contacts in 2000 a regular visiting programme of professors from the Baltic university started with the aim of elaborating common areas of research and education interest. It turned however out, that finally only the fields of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology were chosen for exchange.

Also as a result of the first contacts in 2000, Audrius Ilgevicus, a former student of the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University came in December 2000 for research and finally for his doctor thesis to the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology, where he got his Doctors Degree in September 2004. He returned in July 2005 and became Associate Professor (in German Dozent) at the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. Mr. Ilgevicus received a DAAD scholarship to start with, was then later supported by the host professor's research project and finalized his stay with a Doctors examination according to German rules and with the German title Dr.-Ing.

This situation is different for ordinary foreign students. The first contacts in 2000 were also the start for a regular sending initiative of Lithuanian students in the framework of the Erasmus programme for 3 or more months to the UniBwM. Every year between 2 and 6, sometimes even more students came from Lithuania.

Very disappointing are still the figures in the opposite direction. Until now, only one student each accepted the offer to go to Vilnius and one to

Riga. The main problem seems to be the tight schedule of the curriculum of the UniBwM and the little interest in other foreign languages than English.

### Structure of programmes

#### *At the University of the Bundeswehr Munich:*

The main hint for the integration of the curriculum was the fact that the UniBwM offers 3 trimesters per year instead of two at most other universities. That is why the introduction of the Bachelor and Master programme and the process of integration of the ECTS system into the study programme is still under discussion and not completely finalized. However for the area of electrical engineering and information technology the following has been already settled:

Study time for a Bachelor is	3 years, corresponding to	180 ECTS
Study time for a Master is	1 year and 9 months, corresponding to	120 ECTS
altogether:	4 years and 9 months, corresponding	300 ECTS

For lectures 1 ECTS = 1 TWR (trimester week hour). One "hour" consists of 45 minutes.

Requirement for a Bachelor (formerly Study) project:	12 ECTS
Requirement for a Master (formerly Diploma) project:	30 ECTS

#### *At the universities of all the three Baltic countries:*

The degree system in universities of all the three Baltic countries is a three cycle system. The first cycle (undergraduate) will have a duration of 3 to 4 years (or 240 ECTS credits) and will lead to a Bachelor degree. The second cycle (postgraduate) will have a duration of 2 years (or 120 ECTS credits) and will lead to a Master degree. Finally, the third cycle will last

3 to 4 years and will lead to a doctorate degree. In some special cases like Medicine or Law studies this structure will deviate from the above mentioned the three cycle system.

Although the Bologna process has clearly defined that the first degree, Bachelor, shall be relevant to the European labor market as an appropriate level of qualification, in most Baltic higher education institutions, the Bachelor is considered as a first step for further studies, or as an orientation degree. One reason for this is probably the lack of information among student community and the employers about the employability of the first cycle graduates. Another reason also is that in some countries the opportunities for employment and the associate salaries are higher for graduates with postgraduate studies. There is also the possibility of a bad design of the content of the Bachelor program which may not offer the appropriate skills and competences that are required to make the first degree graduates employable. This is probably a good reason, due to the limited involvement of employers in the design of the curricular in many countries.

### **Criticisms**

There is no question that Europe should also become one day one “education union” and that a comprehensive education should take place in several, at least in two areas, if possible in different countries and with different languages. It is also clear that due to the different development of the European areas in the past exact standards and procedures for requirements and recognition have to be established.

A question seems to be that the European mobility system tries to make too sure that every module, which one has missed in one place has to be replaced by the same module in the new place. Changing places must allow changing subjects. There must be other more general criteria found to make sure what is required. [e.g. learning outcomes]. Academic education comprises also academic freedom.



**Additional flanking measures**

As a consequence of his experiences the author listed a number of flanking measures, which should be considered as well, although they did not belong to the subject of the meeting. They concern:

- Mobility scholarships for East European students
- Accommodation for short time exchange students
- Administration hints and exception rules for hardship situations
- Mandatory language education
- Reconsideration of the European examination mark procedure

## **Our Cooperation between the University of Marburg, Faculty of Education and Åbo Akademi, Vaasa, Finland**

*Sabine Lauber, University of Marburg, Germany*

### **Short History of the Cooperation**

The cooperation was initiated through a former student of both departments who studied Science of Education in Marburg and went to the University of Turku and Åbo Akademi. This Erasmus exchange was so impressive that she decided to go back to Finland to do her post graduate studies there. In 2006 her constant positive reports and obvious academic success led to the idea of establishing a cooperation between the two faculties. The bilateral agreement was signed and soon followed by a first visit from Vaasa to Marburg. In autumn 2006 the first students went to Vaasa, three of them from the Department of Education and one from the Department of Teacher Training. My visit to Vaasa allowed me to get to know the University and the Faculty, do some teaching and participate in a workshop of the doctoral programme. The cooperation was intensified when two doctoral students from Vaasa, one of them the former Marburg student, came to Marburg in spring 2007 for two month to do research for their doctoral theses. Now we just sent out four new students and extended the contract. Of course all of this was accompanied by many mails and telephone calls and faxes.

Why am I describing all of this in detail? Because it shows a lot of the “secrets” why this cooperation has become and now is a successful partnership. For example good and personal relationships (former student, visits, short communication paths), complementary fields of research and study programmes (both Faculties of Education have Departments for Education and Teacher Training, the focus of research and teaching is dif-

ferent but complementary), frequent exchange and the possibility to work on possible difficulties.

### **What we discussed...**

Even though this is a very successful and enjoyable cooperation there are of course things one needs to talk about in order to develop and keep up the good cooperation.

One thing that caused some misunderstandings and the beginning was the different structures in both institutions. Since Åbo Akademi is an offspring of Turku University with about 2000 students there is one central international office which coordinates all the Erasmus activities. Marburg is a full university with 20,000 students; there is a central office for European Cooperation and each faculty has its own coordinator. This difference in structure made it quite difficult at first to establish an understanding of paths of communication, responsibilities and interests of departments and administration. This was solved quickly with visits in both directions which made the structures and needs visible. The same structural difficulties brought about a very interesting discussion about the possibilities of teaching staff visits. Both departments are forced to prepare their study programs so far in advance that there was hardly any chance to create courses together. We are still working on it but the differences in time schedules make it difficult to succeed.

Rather uncomplicated was the introduction and acceptance of forms and procedures. Both universities apply the forms and procedures prescribed by the Erasmus Program. Learning Agreements are prepared in advance and adapted to changes where necessary. Transcripts of Records were issued by Vaasa and accepted by Marburg. All students of the first exchange year have completed a full study programme with good success and will not lose study time because of their exchange year.

We expected them to report more language problems, especially since Åbo Akademi is a Swedish-speaking University in Finland. However, the students were highly motivated, there were ELIC Courses available and last but not least there were courses in English, so students were able to adapt to the language in the first semester. More difficulties arose through the differences in the academic calendar. As mentioned above semester times and vacations are very different in both countries. This causes several problems: first of all intensive teaching exchange is hard to arrange, since times of course planning and times of teaching vary greatly. It also makes it impossible for the German students to start courses in summer term, which would suit many of them better because of their study programme at home. It is even worse for the Finnish students. The differences in the semester schedule causes them either to lose a semester or miss a great part of the summer vacation which many of them need to finance their studies. Next to language problems this is the largest barrier for Finnish students to participate in the programme.

### **Things we do**

In order to further improve the quality and the cooperation itself we also focussed on two areas. First of all we try to establish and keep up academic contact on the level of professors and doctoral students. Further visits and an international online seminar are planned. Second we try to develop the contract to fit the possibilities and interest of both institutions and meet the needs of the students. One result of this is that the contract has been extended to include the Teacher Training Centres. This ensures that students can study accordingly to their study programs at home and the receiving department can take better care of the incoming students. Most of all we focus on the counselling for the students. Both universities

offer online information in English on a general level, students are welcomed and counselled by the central international offices. Students who would like to study in Vaasa are counselled intensively at an intercultural weekend and can participate in an online platform which includes information on formal procedures but also offers the possibility of exchange with current and former Erasmus students. For incoming students there is a mentoring system for exchange students at the Department of Education in Marburg.

### **Current developments**

The most urgent problem seems to be the unbalance between incoming and outgoing students. Even if the difference in the total amount of students is taken into account, there is a grave imbalance of incoming and outgoing students on both sides. Reasons are manifold. The main handicap is language. Second there is the difference in academic time schedules. Also there is not enough information available in English in Marburg, which makes it difficult for counselling staff and students to develop a picture of the possibilities of studies at the department. This includes courses in English, which would allow Finish students to learn German, while they are already studying in Marburg.

This leads us directly to the current developments. A very important factor, the difference between the academic calendars, has attracted political attention and will be hopefully adjusted in the coming years. Our main short term aim is to provide courses and information in Marburg in English so students do not have to do all courses directly in German, thus gaining time to improve their language skills. The further integration of modules is our major mid-term project.

Our latest project is the development of special bilateral agreements between Teacher Training Centres of our partner universities in order to

enable students to also study their core subjects and do their pedagogical training at the same time at the partner university. A major step towards this aim has been taken with the extension of the contract to the Department for Teacher Training and the possibility of guided practical placements in schools. Hopefully all of this will help us to further develop and deepen the cooperation.

## Dialogue Based on a Common Academic and Regional Interest

*Tarja Hyppönen, co-ordinator, Baltic Sea Region Studies, University of Turku*  
*Katrin Hecker, co-ordinator, BalticStudyNet, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*

Located on the Baltic Sea's most Northern and most Southern borders, Finland and Germany both have a special relationship to the region that has become one of the most dynamic in Europe. Especially since the end of the Cold War and the transformation processes connected to it, scientists in both countries have (re)discovered the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) as a manifold subject of study. For the past ten years, the University of Turku, Finland, and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany, have been cooperating intensively on the field of Baltic Sea Region Studies.

### **Early commitment to Baltic Sea Region Studies: The University of Turku**

The Baltic Sea Region Studies programme at the University of Turku started in autumn 1997. In the years 1997–2000 it was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education, the Social Fund of the European Union and the University of Turku. Today, the programme offers an inter/multidisciplinary approach to understanding the characteristics of the region, which has rapidly become involved in the process of European integration. The programme is a contribution to the construction of a new regional identity within the enlarged European Union. Its focus is on historical and current political, economic and cultural development in the Baltic Sea Region, national and international co-operation in and among the countries of the region, as well as the region's perspectives in the context of European regionalisation and globalisation.

The language of instruction and required reading material is English. The programme is co-ordinated by the Faculty of Humanities, but it is not

limited to humanities subjects only. It also includes courses in natural sciences, political sciences, human geography etc.

The Baltic Sea Region Studies programme offers the following schemes of studies: individual courses, and non degree studies relating to students other studies to be used as complementary studies on undergraduate or postgraduate level. They are all based on the academic expertise and research interest of the departments. The new Master's degree programme, which was launched in autumn 2005, is given as joint degree programme with international partners in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. One of the cornerstones of the programme is to organise the teaching by also using the scholarly expertise of other faculties and universities in Turku, as well as the partner universities in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. The programme attracts many international students, among them also Germans. The first German student in the Turku programme graduated in October 2007. She took the degree as a joint degree programme and made her exchange studies in Latvia. Another German student will graduate in 2008.

### **Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin as manager of BSR-projects**

The Department for Northern European Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin contributes to the Master's programme at the University of Turku by offering one semester course packages at Master's level. Here, the Departments special expertise in political sciences and history shapes the profile of the offered programme.

The academic and regional interest in the BSR, as well as in region-related study programmes in Turku and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, has brought the two institutions together and formed the ground for many joint academic activities. The first one was the project *Baltic Sea School Berlin* (2001–2004), an International Quality Network for research and



academic studies in the Baltic Sea Region supported by funds from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Participation in the project was open to researchers and students from the partner universities interested in the political, economic, social and cultural processes taking place in the Baltic Sea Region. The *Baltic Sea School* programme offered a one-year programme Master of Arts in Baltic Sea Region Studies, a one-year doctoral class, guest lectureships for academic staff, as well as workshops, methodology schools, and conferences.

### **A new form of cooperation: BalticStudyNet**

Since 2005, the two institutions cooperate closely in the project *BalticStudyNet*, an information and marketing project under the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus programme (action 4 – Enhancing attractiveness). In its first funding phase (2005–2006), *BalticStudyNet – Network for Promoting and Developing Higher Education in the Baltic Sea Region* was a networking programme for the promotion of higher education in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. It aimed at mapping higher education institutions and existing study programmes, developing innovative curricula, and designing new tools for academic training according to existing needs. It had its focus on study and research programmes dealing with political, economic and cultural aspects of the Baltic Sea Region. *BalticStudyNet I* was dedicated to collect information on Baltic Sea Region Studies and related study programmes as well as to make this information available to the public. The consortium partners – Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (coordinator), the University of Turku and the University of Copenhagen – organised international conferences, workshops, and a summer school in support of higher education institutions, and to the benefit of scholars and students worldwide, not only from countries of the Baltic Sea Region and the European Union.

In the current phase (2007–2009), *BalticStudyNet – Promoting Baltic Sea Region Higher Education worldwide* as it is now called, is conducted by an enlarged consortium – Berlin (coordinator), Turku, Copenhagen, Södertörn, Tartu, Riga, Kaunas, and Gdansk. The aim of *BalticStudyNet II* is to globally promote the Baltic Sea Region as an area of top-quality, innovative higher education. The focus is on study and research opportunities regarding political, historical, economic and cultural perspectives on the region. Target regions are North America, Russia including the Caucasus and Central Asia, Australia, China and India. The central activity is a comprehensive promotion campaign featuring the BSR and its higher education structures. It includes a travelling exhibition and innovative ‘Lecture and Promotion Tours’ to higher education and related institutions in third countries to impart knowledge about the BSR and its higher education structures. Workshops for multipliers from third-country higher education institutions introducing them to the BSR and its higher education sector will be held and a textbook containing basic knowledge about the BSR and other marketing material will be produced.

This challenging and fruitful cooperation between the two institutions in Turku and Berlin will certainly continue after the end of *BalticStudyNet II* in 2009, both at academic level and in form of other innovative activities.

### **Further information**

<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/skan/>

[www.balticstudy.net](http://www.balticstudy.net)

<http://balticstudies.utu.fi>

## A Student Perspective on Transnational Mobility and ECTS

*Henrik Thorn, The National Union of Students in Denmark*

From a student point of view the chance of mobility and the chance of experiencing a new culture are a unique opportunity we must all appreciate and in no way take for given. Therefore, the huge work on the Bologna process and hereby the ECTS tool must be of great importance in every student organization throughout Europe.

In Europe we have seen huge complications in implementing the ECTS tool, and especially getting the administrations around the different universities to accept and think in ECTS has proven to be a big problem. As a student representative I see the problem discussed at the DAAD conference in Hamburg as a great problem with institutions thinking too much of ECTS and its rules, rather than its use. If universities saw ECTS as a way to help them and their students to have a semester at another institution, I would aspect the implementation would be much easier.

Therefore, I see the two following things as the biggest conflicts with student mobility today. Firstly the way that ECTS has been implemented around Europe, and secondly the way that universities are cooperating when students are applying for a visit to another university. To deal with the second problem first, I feel that universities in Europe must accept the academic level existing in Europe, and therefore more easily accept foreign students. This would, along with partnerships between universities, help the students with easier and free mobility and in my opinion lead to even more students shifting between universities.

The way ECTS is implemented around Europe creates a huge problem which can be solved in two ways. Either by establishing a one-way method for ECTS to be implemented and used, which needs to be supervised by

the European Union, or by having more trust between the universities in all of Europe so that they are focused on ECTS and so that they have understood the principle of the tool. This second solution demands that the governments in Europe demand by law that all universities implement ECTS.

### **Students will go abroad**

I think it is important for everyone to understand that students, ECTS or not, will travel to another university during their study period. When visiting another institution it is more than good education which comes to count. The culture, the language, the way of living, friends and much more is a part of why students wish to travel to another place.

In the statistics from Germany we are able to see that approximately 52 % of all students going abroad do not get the academic recognition for their work, but that they still go. This is a strong proof that students see their stay abroad as a very important part of them being “academicalized”. This has also been put in place by many governments throughout Europe, and is an important point in the Bologna process.

When talking about mobility, I therefore do not think of students receiving the correct amount of ECTS points for a given course. I would only like students to be able to travel around more easily and for Europe to become a more popular place to study. If the ECTS tool is able to help solve these problems, I would personally think that we have come a great deal of the way in opening the institutions. Hereafter it is important to look at students getting the academic recognition they deserve, so that they don't have to be at the university forever.

### **Where do students go?**

A great issue in the mobility of students is where they are going and why they are going to those places.

Many countries are experiencing sending more students out than they are receiving from other countries. I think it is important for the future project to map the reasons why students travel, and where they are going. It is important to understand how to attract students within Europe, thereby keeping them inside of the EU borders instead of sending many students to the US and Australia, where beaches are attracting students.

When doing this data collection, it is crucial to remember how different students are throughout Europe. Attracting students from Denmark compared to Germany cannot be done in the same manner. At the meeting in Hamburg I got the impression that German students are looking more towards academic recognition than Danish students, who I think are more drawn towards the beaches and the culture.

### **My advises for the future**

To create prospects for the Bologna process and the use of ECTS as a tool for student mobility I think a few changes have to be made. First of all the process needs to be a joint operation from all stakeholders, which means that all universities need to work actively with Bologna and the goals of this process. As long as ECTS and Bologna are being seen as a governmental tool, the universities will not implement ECTS to its full potential.

For this to become reality, all universities need to feel their own use of ECTS and see how it helps them resolve some problems when receiving and sending students. I think that some conferences talking about ECTS, like the DAAD conference in Hamburg but with more generally administrative staff from around Europe, the experts need to hand the assignments out and establish a general idea about ECTS instead of its being a matter for a closed circle of experts. We need to make all universities in Europe experts in this field, or else I fear that ECTS will experience problems for many years to come.

All students must be given the advice to travel during their education and the universities must point out the importance and the possibilities of travelling. In Denmark it has been pointed out that almost any company would prefer their future employees to have travelled, which has led to many student going abroad. I think all countries should focus more on getting the students to travel and thereby include the ECTS tool as a way of making it easy for students to visit other cultures. If we can succeed in making it easy for students to travel the world freely, the ECTS tool and the Bologna process will have been a success. But not until then.

## **"Throw Your Students Out!"**

### **How to Encourage Transnational Student Mobility?**

*Juhana Harju, Educational Officer,  
National Union of University Students in Finland*

The emphasis of this article is on finding reasons why student mobility is or is not developing sufficiently, and what staff of Higher Education institutions (HEIs) and other parties involved can do to advance mobility. As a representative of the National Union of University Students in Finland I can declare that international co-operation of HEIs is desirable and student mobility creates positive opportunities for individuals and society as a whole. It is – and it has to be in the future – more about building common ground for sharing knowledge and ideas than draining brain-power from developing countries. So what can we do together to bring open-minded and extensive transnational mobility to our institutions?

#### **Student's Perspective: Opportunist, Customer or Citizen of the World?**

There are many myths surrounding exchange students' motives and reasons to seek international challenges. The coarsest generalization is to see student mobility as a type of vacation. Students going to California or Australia are looking for the sunshine and surfing. Barcelona is popular because the nightlife is varied and interesting. These claims are fundamentally wrong. There might be a few individuals who don't take studying so seriously, but they are the exception that proves the rule. If HEIs take the needs of exchange students seriously and make their courses and study modules transparent, inclusive and inspiring, then there is no need to spend time on the beach. In addition to that the acquired knowledge has to be also transparent and transferable – in Europe this means using ECTS correctly and coherently.

Exchange students and international degree students are sometimes claimed to be customers of HEIs as they are using resources not available in their home country. A customer is one who pays for services and expects a quality product – education – without giving anything in return except the study fees. From the student's point of view it's not correct to call knowledge and information mere "products", ready to be consumed by education-hungry customers. It has been proven time and time again that a system open to everybody is the system creating the best overall results. Open communication between staff of HEIs and students, both international and local, creates an atmosphere of mutual understanding and makes learning a two-way process. A customer will not do anything "for free" that benefits the HEI, so universities might also suffer when facing abrupt demands of customer-students. The fundamental principles and academic practices of universities might suffer if we take the "customer" viewpoint too seriously.

Student mobility as a mean to promote international co-operation, exchange of views and cultures and create a basis for sustainable economic development might feel like stargazing for some, but for many students it is a reason to participate in exchange programs. This view of students as citizens of the world is not universally applicable category for every situation, but when trying to promote student mobility HEIs should also capitalize on the "soft values" and refer to the recognized traditions of universities. However, compared to the student-customer and student-holidaymaker the student-citizen categorization is the most truthful and also fruitful for future purposes.

It is easier to look kindly upon rising student mobility if the benefits can be seen by everyone: students, HEI's staff, employers and society as a whole. In conclusion it should be stated that students seek value for their efforts, something useful for their future studies and working life. As



compensation students are ready to do everything in their power to succeed in international programs.

### **Higher Education Institutions' Perspective: The Cost and the Gain**

Universities throughout the world are trying to improve their overall quality, increase international co-operation with other institutions and match new challenges brought by the globalization. Transnational mobility is one important tool for HEIs to bring forward the necessary changes and modernization of educational practices.

Systems and policies created to increase mobility may also strengthen the educational system at national level. For example, in Finland ECTS has been of huge advantage for students and universities, even though the amount of exchange students coming in and going out of Finland has increased only slightly. It is the spirit of international and forward looking development that pushes on education, accumulation of knowledge and research. Stagnation caused by unnecessary prejudices and foolish pride of HEIs or ones responsible for national educational policies is one of the worst things that can happen to students. When the world around is changing then higher education has to react – at least – or try to shape the future for the better.

What is the cost of transnational mobility for the HEIs? We have already established that at least in Europe many changes concerning mobility, like ECTS, are adopted in any case. Language studies and courses with international perspective are demanded by students and employers alike, so many universities offer willingly these studies. It is simply reasonable to use systems already in place to improve HEI's functionality and promote student mobility. Other costs for HEIs are insubstantial when compared to the potential benefits of increased mobility. However special needs of international students must be taken care of.

The biggest benefit of increased internationalization for universities and educational system is the chance – make it or break it moment – to view old beliefs and practices in new light. Simple observations about student and professor co-operation may tell a lot about the state of affairs inside an HEI: is it extremely difficult to get appointment with a professor or do students and members of the staff work together in very informal manner? Simple questions asked by the international students are very usable, because by seeking unprejudiced answers to these fundamental questions universities can adopt best international practices and update their strategies. We are not talking about complicated issue here: tolerance towards diversity of ideas and students brings by itself positive and much needed change.

### **Conclusion: We Need To Stop Worrying So Much**

Some hopes and demands about international mobility are unfounded or misled. One of the worst examples is to demand concrete results too fast. We cannot decide that international co-operation is useful only if the results are calculable and one can see the “profits” right away. When we are developing a system of interdependency and mutual trust – like ECTS – patience is needed. The reward will be waiting in the, hopefully not too distant future.

There are many students willing to pursue international degree studies or take part in exchange programs even though there are no guarantees of high-quality teaching or suitable living conditions. For some it is literally a leap into the unknown. But there is no stopping the adventurous and knowledge seeking student who dreams of a better future built on education and mutual understanding. A little bit of this boldness could also be of some use for universities.

When everything said above is taken into account, the message is clear: more and better mobility is needed promptly. Mobility is the only way to meet the demands of an ever-changing globalized world.

## Student Mobility and ECTS – What is the Role of Quality Assurance?

*Ulf Banscherus, former student member of German Accreditation Council*

Since the very beginning of European integration, mobility has been one of the key issues in the political discussion. This holds especially true in the area of education policy, where the recognition of academic degrees has been one of the major topics on the agenda of the Council of Europe since the 1950s. In this time, student exchange programs and studies of foreign languages were perceived as an important step towards building a peaceful Europe. Students should get the opportunity to learn more about different cultures and different people by spending some time in a foreign country. Therefore, student mobility should contribute to breaking down cultural prejudices and to building up tolerance and respect to the plurality of lifestyles, belief systems and convictions across Europe.

In the 1980s the European Commission introduced ECTS, both to promote and to regulate student mobility. ECTS was supposed to make it easier for students to get academic credits and to have their degrees and courses recognised. However, from the very beginning, the students reported various problems with the initiative, because of lack of confidence and lack of readiness concerning the comparability of evaluation systems. Some even reported mistrust of the quality of foreign higher education institutions. Despite the efforts towards coordinating the national higher education policies and further promoting the mobility with the Bologna process of 1999, these problems still prevail.

Perhaps the easiest way to make student performances comparable would be the standardisation of higher education across the European countries. However, since academic plurality is one of the key quality

characteristics of European higher education, such a solution is neither advisable nor feasible. And still the differences in academic cultures and traditions, in didactics and topics are important driving forces of mobility. The wish to make new experiences is more important than recognition itself, although recognition has its obvious merits for students. Thus the challenge to the Bologna process is to enhance both the comparability and the compatibility of higher education systems, while at the same time guaranteeing academic plurality in Europe.

In the last years different instruments have been introduced to promote mobility and recognition. The common tools are the enhanced ECTS, the Diploma Supplement and the European Qualifications Framework. ECTS and Diploma Supplement were devised to give a precise description of the average student workload and the expected learning outcomes. Thus, ECTS and the Diploma Supplement aim to enhance the transparency of student performance. Additionally the qualifications framework offers non-technical definitions of capabilities, skills, etc. to make individual performances better comparable.

But in spite of the development of these measures, the recognition problem still remains unsolved. Transparent descriptions of courses obviously cannot offset the lack of trust in the quality of programs and institutions in other countries. The European register of quality assurance agencies has been established in order to rectify this situation. National quality assurance agencies will have to prove their own quality and would only be accepted by the register committee upon a successful completion of the requirements. Consequently, a certification of a program by a registered agency will be a proof of quality of that program and thus a starting point to recognition.

Gradually, an elaborate model for recognition and mobility has emerged, but serious doubts remain whether the addition of the quality

assurance element will cut the Gordian knot. Since distrust and reservation are widespread in academic Europe, there still exist many spurious arguments undermining the recognition of courses and degrees. That is why the core problem of the recognition issue seems to be the missing obligation of the higher education institutions to recognise student performance. So the institutions need to be legally mandated to do so. But if recognition is to be mandatory, there is also a demand for criteria to assess competences and performances.

These criteria need to be precise enough to enable comparability, yet loose enough to guarantee academic plurality. For this reason it is not appropriate to define detailed standards for different subjects at the European level. Instead subject benchmark statements should complement the national qualifications frameworks. ECTS and the Diploma Supplement should constitute a demand for recognition if the acquired competence is compatible with the benchmark statement. Subject benchmark statements could offer an interpretation of competences which is a prerequisite for making full use of the qualifications frameworks. In addition quality assurance can guarantee that the quality of a course or a program achieves the benchmark level. The demand to make recognition mandatory is certainly a contradiction of the popular call for self-government of higher education institutions, but a higher level of self-government alone obviously does not make a contribution to enhanced recognition.



## **Bilateral Cooperation: Quality and ECTS in Transnational Mobility**

*Asta Janonyte, Lithuanian National Union of Students*

The phenomenon of transnational education has been gaining more and more importance in recent years. It is closely linked to both the Bologna process and the process of commodification of education, which have changed the European and global landscape of higher education dramatically in the last decade of the 20th century. Transnational education can be provided in various forms, either in campus settings or by e-learning, other distance learning arrangements and program articulations, including twinning arrangements, whereby two or more institutions jointly define a study program in terms of credits and credit transfers. These may or may not lead to joint or double degrees. Distance learning arrangements and virtual universities, where the learner is provided with the course material via post or web-based solutions and self administers the learning process at home are also one of the ways of bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

All these new forms of HE share certain characteristics. They all cross national borders and thus pose challenges and questions to national education systems and international co-operation with regards to equal access to higher education, quality assurance and accreditation, as well as recognition.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is one of the measures used to implement the Bologna process is the main actor in recognition processes. This credit system can have various advantages, both academically and in the social dimension. Credit systems can be beneficial for achieving more transparency and compatibility between different educational structures. The current situation is often based upon the teaching

input being the reference for the recommended duration of a study programme. The actual student workload that is necessary to successfully complete part of a study programme is often neglected. ECTS should change this into a system whereby the latter is taken as the reference for stipulating the duration of a study programme, the result should be that the duration can become more realistic. A credit system can facilitate recognition procedures and can also open the possibility for flexible learning paths and thus facilitates the access to higher education for non-traditional learners. By recognising experiences of prior learning and thus already constituting part of a programme, credit systems can facilitate the access to higher education. In order to achieve the advantages certain criteria must be fulfilled, thus ensuring a proper implementation and use of a credit system.

To continue, quality assurance is also of big importance in this international cooperation. However, quality assurance arrangements are difficult to implement in transnational education. Some forms of transnational provision, especially international institutions, offshore campuses and corporate universities, are particularly challenging in terms of quality assurance. Whilst recognition is comparatively easy for twinning arrangements or branch campuses of traditional universities, the recognition of degrees of international institutions, offshore campuses or corporate universities is often equally as problematic as their quality assurance.

If implemented properly, transnational education can stimulate international co-operation and lead to an enhancement of quality of both the transnational education programs and the programs of the traditional providers. In countries with a rapidly growing demand for higher education but not enough HE programmes available, transnational education can help in bridging the gap between supply and demand of higher education. Twinning programs and program articulations can offer inter-



national and broad perspectives in many areas, which benefit from the global perspective. This can and should also be addressed by creating joint or double degrees as a result of these arrangements. However, in order to reach those objectives certain guidelines and principles have to be followed. It is clear that further clarification is needed in order to make transnational education beneficial to all concerned, in terms of the learning opportunities provided, the standard of the award or qualification, and the quality of what is offered to the students, in so doing making collaborative arrangements a real partnership, and therefore acceptable from the perspective of both receiving and sending institutions/systems. In order to deal with matters specific to transnational education, a better understanding of its practices, of its normative basis, and of its consequences for the receiving and the sending systems and institutions is needed. The changes and the ensuing public debates about higher education also have implications for the parameters of "quality" in education and for the principles and procedures that underpin quality assurance arrangements.

### **Student Perspective on transnational education**

Students generally have a positive opinion on the development of new possibilities of mobility and studies abroad. They also know the importance for their employability of having an international curriculum. Thus students especially welcome certain forms of transnational education like "programme articulations" and "international institutions". But more generally students see the positive aspects of transnational education because they are conscious of living in a global society where it is important to be global students and becoming global citizens understanding the values of multiculturalism. They also acknowledge the important role of some branch campuses and offshore institutions as a help, under certain

conditions, for the education system supply in some developing countries and Eastern European countries. Moreover, even if e-learning cannot substitute for true mobility, it is certainly a way for enlarging access to education for more and new types of students.

The main reason for these kinds of concerns that students have on developments of transnational education can be identified in a general lack of information of what is really happening. Students can find information only from personal contacts with other students or via the web. They are not consulted about these new providers and cannot consider themselves as representative of these "special" students. It is very difficult for most students and students' unions to have a clear and complete picture of who is on stage, how they are installed, who regulates and who controls the process in their country, if the institution is recognised/accredited and by which country. When students are informed and guaranteed on the quality of the degree, the process is welcomed as an opportunity as it increases variety and develops that kind of good competition and especially international cooperation which also push forward better quality.

The rapid growth of transnational education arrangements and offers poses major challenges to national HE systems and builds up a tension between transnational and national education.

Issues arising from the increasing European cooperation in the Bologna process of setting up a European Higher Education area and the general process of globalisation have certain characteristics in common with bilateral cooperation, as well as partly contradicting each other.

## Conclusions

*Dr. Birger Hendriks, Ministry of Science, Economics and Transport of Land Schleswig-Holstein, Bologna Representative of the KMK Germany*

This conference touches one of the key issues of the Bologna process.

Mobility has been one of the core elements of this process from its beginning. Mobility, and in particular the transnational mobility of students, graduates and staff is essential for the cultural growth of Europe, for international cooperation between individuals and between universities.

In addition, mobility also seems to be most important for

- quality of study programmes and teaching as well as for quality assurance
- transparency of study programmes
- international orientation of study programmes
- competitiveness of the graduates and for their employability.

Every participant in this conference is fully aware of these impacts of mobility. And in particular the Nordic and Baltic countries seem to prove these experiences. In these countries we can realize a mobility culture. The orientation towards abroad is stronger than in many other countries. Also the mastery of the English language seems to be natural and nothing special. Universities are well functioning and nice. Several Nordic countries also fulfil benchmark conditions to us. In particular in the north of Germany we appreciate a strong cooperation with these countries.

But apart from that many challenges remain in Europe and in some areas tools such as ECTS, quality assurance and recognition create more questions rather than giving answers to the institutions and the students. Why? Perhaps because of traditions, because in some areas they seem to

cause bureaucracy and it is far from a scientific approach to talk about credits, to recognise them, to count workloads and talk about Diploma Supplements rather than to discuss scientific questions or do some research.

The Bologna process aims at better and reliable conditions for studying in terms of avoiding loss of time and for fostering the employability of the graduates. These aspects require the professional use of the tools which are at hand: the two cycle structure of study courses, the credit point system, recognition, and the Diploma Supplement

### **ECTS**

This system is presently being overhauled. Yesterday we received a new draft of the ECTS key features sent out by the European Commission. They now include the accumulation aspect, the orientation towards learning outcomes, and the workload that students need to achieve these. These are important points. In particular the lack of orientation towards learning outcomes was perhaps a perfect excuse for several institutions not to use ECTS in the right way. There is one other interesting and important point that is new in ECTS: the link to the Qualifications Framework. The Commission tries to include also pre-learning (formal and non-formal learning), and also PhD theses. The whole paper is under discussion and we will see the result in the spring of next year.

### **Recognition and Quality Assurance**

The London Communiqué says: Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components of the EHEA.

One of the crucial points of an international system of cooperation is mutual reliability. Therefore we need to provide reliable quality assurance

systems at the national level and some cross border information about it. In Bergen Ministers agreed on the principle of a European Register of quality assurance agencies. The E4 Group has now worked out the practicalities of setting up this register. The purpose of the register is to allow all stakeholders open access to information about trustworthy agencies. The register will be voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent. Agencies will have to pay fees for being admitted to the register. The E4 Group responsible for the register will report progress regularly to the BFUG. We appreciate the financial help from the European Commission during the first years.

### **Globalisation and employability**

The globalisation of our economies is not one of the main contents of the London communiqué. Nevertheless it is a virtual reference point for the process. In the year 2000 the European Union accepted the Lisbon Agenda to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010. This strategy is planned to increase employment across the EU. Many businesses are trading in the global marketplace, not only multinational groups but also the small and medium sized companies. The internet opens these markets to every pharmacy; the trading paths require law firms to give advice around the world. The Siemens Company has production units and branches in 195 states of the world; think of car producers, of Microsoft, airlines, oil companies and so on. For companies to acquire the skills and competencies they need and for their employees to advance their careers, the European countries need to improve education and in particular higher education in all professions.

This is not possible without the reference to international orientation. Even looking at the third cycle, the doctorate, companies ask for international experience and project management, for example in the techni-

cal disciplines. If higher education is to boost competitiveness and growth in the European economies the necessity of cooperating with industry and the employer's side is obvious. When designing study programs and qualifications the dialogue with chambers of commerce and professional associations is essential.

In this context the London Communiqué addresses the question of employability. The degrees students are awarded should enable them to find an adequate occupation. This is not only in the interest of industry but also of utmost importance for the graduate. "We urge institutions to further develop partnerships and cooperation with employers in the ongoing process of curriculum innovation based on learning outcomes." (London Communiqué Paragraph 3.5).

But when looking at the introduction of the London Communiqué you will find that the international orientation is not reduced to economic references. "Building on our rich and diverse European cultural heritage, we are developing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunities and democratic principles that will facilitate mobility, increase employability and strengthen Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness." This wording makes it clear that the Bologna process is not one-dimensional.

### **The European Higher Education Area**

This is a second main reference point of the London Communiqué: getting the European Higher Education Area up and functioning by 2010. All Bologna member states and organizations have worked quite a lot during the last eight years towards the EHEA. The Stocktaking Report 2007 makes it clear that good progress has been made. But at the same time there is still some way to go. This includes two fields of activities. The first is that we need to continue our endeavours to make the process reality at the

national and the institutional level, which means in the universities. The two cycle system, quality assurance, ECTS, modularisation, qualification frameworks and other requirements must be implemented as far and as quickly as possible. We aim at having achieved a substantial quantity of our goals by 2010. Ministers in London asked for concentration of the reforms on improving the experience of students. By the end of their studies they should be in the best position to get a job. This focus on learning outcomes should facilitate learning on an international scale.

The second point is how to design and to define the EHEA cornerstones for the time beyond 2010. In the BFUG, as well as in the ministerial meeting, the comments on this challenge have been reluctant because it is not useful to develop definitions and goals without thorough preparation. During the London Conference, Ministers and other stakeholders had the opportunity to discuss the future of the EHEA in parallel panels. It was quite interesting to see that after a short while these discussions concentrated on present problems and challenges. This happened because the future is in some parts still far away, and furthermore it is of course very difficult to think about the distant future, 10 or 15 years ahead. Let me try to describe at least some basic considerations which are likely to be common ground within the Bologna family and which may guide us in our future discussions:

1. We will steer the European Higher Education development with non-binding declarations or communiqués, leading to common standards and principles. We do not conclude binding contracts.
2. Every Bologna member state maintains its culture and structures. The Bologna process does not harmonize the national or the Higher Education institutional policies.
3. The Bologna process needs countries to act voluntarily but decisively when making the process a reality.

4. To a certain extent the Bologna process creates a European corporate identity, a European dimension, as one of the Bologna action lines requires.
5. We all accept certain common values, in particular: autonomy of higher education institutions, participation of students at all levels, public responsibility for HE.
6. The Bologna process is a network with a shifting low budget administration based on the member states' contributions.
7. The Bologna process makes Europe more competitive and at the same time more cooperative.
8. It is a **process**: dynamic, motivating, requiring commitment.
9. The Bologna process is also attractive for areas outside Europe and is open to cooperation all over the world.

The mechanism of the Bologna process is simple: Ministers identify and agree upon certain topics and goals. Then, at the European and at the national level we all have to work hard to reach these goals and implement the necessary structures and measures. In some cases governments must be active to set the right conditions for the EHEA to become a reality. And it is up to the higher education institutions to convert the necessary into the real. This means that the Bologna process sets standards and conditions from outside without being binding.

We can identify certain factors which are important for the realisation of the Bologna reforms: at the institutional level the internal horizontal communication and the quality of leadership exercised by the institutional managers. With respect to the national context, the quality of information, guidance and financial support significantly affects institutional capacity to act. And last but not least: the degree of institutional autonomy motivates the institutions to promote the reforms, depending on whether or not they feel they can forge their own future.



We need and want a European Higher Education Area that sticks to these principles. An EHEA should continue the development as a process. We can learn from industry: A company which cannot change with the times is unlikely to survive. And I think that goes for the higher education sector too.

