

The role of governments and stakeholders in the Bologna Process

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to speak here and share experience with you.

The organizers asked me to speak on governance and in the programme I noted the title The role of Governments and stakeholders in the Bologna process under the heading of The working agenda of the BFUG since the implementation of the European Higher Education Area.

Reflecting on that I had to chose where to start and what to focus on.

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Reflecting on Governments and stakeholders, I thought of Governments, national ones, the Minister of Education, Higher Education, in particular. But also other Ministers could be involved, like Agriculture, Health, Interior for areas of Police and Safety.

Apart from national level government, regional level governments may be involved. I think of Germany where the “lander” are responsible for education and the Federal government can boost developments by additional subsidies. I do not know how the situation is in Russia.

I also consider the Higher education institutions. Given the context of policies and funding they have their own responsibilities, the institution are governed and are stakeholders.

The employees, the staff in universities, the Faculties are governed govern themselves and are at the same time stakeholders; They play an important role: when and why to rethink the Learning outcomes, what students need to know and be able to do; the Curriculum, with whom to discuss it. Is that discussed with surrounding labour market? Are there regulations to discuss it with societal partners? Are there regulations for assessment of learning outcomes? for internships, for incubators of research results, for spin-offs?

What role and responsibility structures are laid down within the University/The Higher Education Institution (I use both terms always in a general meaning for all educational institutions that offer higher education.)

Students have to be involved in these discussions, alumni preferably too – what do they expect? what have they come for? And of those that graduated, one wants to know what are they doing presently, what have they valued in their education, have they missed anything? Which brings me to society as a whole as a stakeholder. When rethinking and reshaping Learning outcomes, curricula and assessments to go with it, Universities and their faculties could better be in touch with various parts of society in order to remain in touch with developments outside the education institutions.

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Reflecting on the working agenda of the BFUG I listed various actions that need to be taken. National Qualifications Frameworks need to be in place by 2012

Quality assurance needs to be transparent, and it needs to play a role in securing the levels in the National Qualifications Framework. In this way countries can trust each others system and recognize degrees. Furthermore as European Higher Education area we are striving for excellence in all aspects of higher education, which requires a constant focus on quality. And a quality and innovation mindset in all those involved in higher education.

It involves the granting of ECTS for parts of the study, the issuing of a Diploma Supplement which provides information on what the Diploma entails.

It involves student-centered learning, based at all levels on state of the art research and developments, thus fostering innovation and creativity in society.

It provides opportunities for mobility during studies or when passing to a next level of education. In fact a target was set for 2020: by then at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad.

There is the social dimension target, which means that we share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations.

Employability of the graduates is at stake, therefore both governments and educational institutions have to relate with employers and other stakeholders in society on the rationale of their reforms, their learning outcomes. Internships are also a very good instrument in this; And the validation of the experience as an intern, jointly by the teaching staff and the societal organisation where the intern was based. That facilitates communication on knowledge skills and competences which are of relevance; of course minding a balance between detailed knowledge or skills that may be needed in a particular situation and broader knowledge and skills that are of relevance for many more jobs.

Lifelong learning; it implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies, and work-based routes; and also recognising prior applied non-formal and informal learning.

To know if policies succeed, and for information on our systems, comparable data are needed in Europe. Also a wish is that not only levels, but also education on offer in Higher education institutions is made transparent to ensure that potential students can choose their preferred surrounding or specialisation, and for institutions to see with what other institutions they could compare themselves. The information concerns not only science research output, like in present league tables, but is to include information on education, which is to be provided by the institutions.

Of course funding of the education is important and so is the openness of each system and of Europe as a whole to the entire world.

That is the BFUG agenda in a nutshell, as taken from the Communiqué agreed by the Ministerial Conference in Leuven in 2009.

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Reflecting on these two perspectives, that of governing and the Bologna process agenda, one can ponder on where the action should be, in other words: who is responsible for what action? To focus I distinguished Ministries and Education institutions. The divide is ambiguous. In Europe Ministries are usually responsible for funding, at least when it concerns public institutions. In private institutions the situation is different.

Ministries are also responsible for legislation. Of course legislation should be in place for the three cycle structure, if wished for the possibility of a short cycle, for ECTS and to issue the Diploma Supplement. Also for joint degrees legislative provisions could be needed. If these are not in place yet, it needs to be taken up by the government and universities have to push the government to take it up. Universities can also advise on the kind of regulation. Also private universities could fit in this regulation and push for it if needed. Or, as in Great Britain, institutions could make their own regulations.

Within the universities quality concern, a quality culture, is, or should be, in the mind of all teachers and all governors, leaders, organizers. Quality assurance formally regulated is of help, and somehow this probably also needs to be laid down in legislation. Governors of universities have to emphasize quality standards and of course it is stimulating when they themselves live up to it as well. In some countries legislation on quality assurance for higher education differs for public and private institutions, in others the same legislation and quality assurance bodies function for both kind of institutions.

For private universities it is important that their level can be compared with formally state recognized institutions. Therefore it is important that the central government facilitates comparable quality assurance for both public and private institutions.

Student centred learning is a pedagogical attitude, usually a matter taken up by the teaching staff of universities. It is of great help when governors of universities stimulate this being taken up.

Employability is to be a concern of institutions. The institutions seek contact with employers, places for internships, thus being in a position to communicate with stakeholders in society about the learning outcomes of a programme in relation to expectations of employers or wider society. Best practice is when institutions monitor what their alumni are doing and where, some time after graduation and can show spin offs of their research. Thus institutions have an input for reflection and possible action concerning relevance of learning outcomes.

Implementing the three cycle structure is typical a task for all teaching staff in a university. It includes description of learning outcomes of programmes which are related to the generic learning outcomes described in the overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area, the end level descriptors. And of course also the curriculum and assessment of learning outcomes goes with this. And so are implementing credits related to workload and the information which is provided in the Diploma Supplement.

Adequate implementation is very much helped and stimulated by an active promotion by the Governing Board and inclusion in internal quality assurance mechanisms.

Mobility is also typically an aspect of the education process which can have a structural place in the curriculum. It is also up to governors in institutions to emphasize this and promote structural relations between institutions and staff and embedding in curricula to make it happen. (Of course national governments could also stimulate this with funds.) But it are the institutions who have to ensure hospitality for students from abroad and have to ensure that credits obtained elsewhere can be acknowledged when their own students have done a study period abroad.

Research and innovation definitely spring from work in institutions. Governors have a role in fostering focus and impact, in facilitating transfer to society, promoting valorisation, thus also facilitating employability of graduates.

A number of Bologna process agenda items I put in the middle as both governments and institutions have an essential role to realise them.

The national qualifications framework, for which national authorities have to take the initiative; the quality of end levels need to be ensured, thus quality assurance bodies have a role. But institutions can also be pushers if they could gain when their level is made clear.

The social dimension is for the government to ensure access for all who have the capacity to engage in higher education. At the same time the institutions have to ensure that students from all layers of the population feel at home in the institute and are taken up in the learning process.

Data collection is something that governments might agree on, but for which institutions have to provide the data. Thus it is important to be in touch on what data would be of relevance, to be motivated to provide them.

International openness, similar: governments agree to like it; institutions are the actors to realise it.

Parliament is a factor one has to be aware of for all actions taken by governments. Parliament has to agree with it and often decides on priorities for funding. Thus Parliament is an important actor to count with.

Students are also important actors to count with. They often are extremely valuable as creative thinking persons on what they encounter. Keep them, or make them, involved in

transformations, in evaluations, in reflections on the quality of the programme, also the alumni are of value and their employers probably.

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Thus a number of actors have a role to play: the higher education institutions, governments, Parliaments, quality assurance agencies. Each can push the other to take up its role and many agenda items require joint actions by a combination of these actors.
How to get that done?

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My main experience is from the Netherlands, flat country, with polders and water.

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In the Netherlands we made a kind of steering group which brings all the actors together.

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The steering group is composed of:

1. The government which is chair and the secretariat
2. The quality assurance agency (NVAO)
3. The branch organisation of the research universities
4. The branch organisation of the universities of Applied Science
5. The one student union
6. The other student union
7. University employees through one organisation present and another one always receiving all mails and documentation
8. The employers (large ones and small and medium enterprises)
9. The chair of the Bologna Experts; the bologna experts are 6 persons with strategic functions in universities and 2 students.

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The steering group is an informal group.

It functions through open discussions and informal commitments.

It sets priorities based on experience with the actual situation in the country

It considers what needs to be organised by legislation and for what agreement at governance level between ministry and institutions would be adequate. Or what has to be done purely in universities.

The agreement of the steering group is informed to the formal governing levels.

It is at these levels that the formal decisions are taken

Between the Minister or the Director of Higher Education - and the governing boards of universities, or the governing Board of their branch organisation

Also decisions are taken after agreement between the Minister or the Director of Higher Education and the student organisations.

In all matters employer organisations are usually consulted.

Once in a while, when situations are politically complicated the government seeks advice from *External experts*. Recently the Dutch Minister has asked advice whether the higher education system was sustainable in the future, given the still increasing number of students. The Minister installed an advisory committee with a former politician as Chair and also members from USA and a researcher from Ireland. Their advice is presently being implemented.

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What is the situation in The Netherlands regarding the Bologna Process?

Gradually many elements were realised through legislation.

First the Bachelor Master Doctorate structure, together with the change to accreditation for the quality assurance. The legislation was finalised in 2002. The change to 60 ECTS credits was legislated a little later. The National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education was put in place and self-referenced in 2009. Provision of the Diploma Supplement according to the European format and the possibility of joint degrees were enacted in 2010.

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Thus: the steering group agreed to start the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. It was started by the government, which asked the NVAO to organise the self-certification process with external peers. It was self-certified in 2009.

Presently the NLQF-LLL for all education levels required for the European Union is in preparation.

The government is stimulating Lifelong learning by facilitating assessment of prior learning, also prior informal and non-formal learning.

For the social dimension the government provides grants and loans which have a greater grant component for students from low income families. Monitoring of the social dimension is done by monitoring the background of students. The government also facilitates active participation in Eurostudent three yearly monitoring, for benchmarking with other countries.

Employability is monitored by institutions through questionnaires to their alumni. As part of the regular quality assurance institutions have to be able to show where their graduates go after graduation.

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As government we have also communicated directly with the institutions at the level of the day to day work.

A fieldtrip was organised in 2010; nearly all higher education institutions (approximately 50) had been visited by a total group of 6 persons, always 2 or 3 persons per institution asked answers to a standardised set of questions related to international co-operation and mobility of students and staff.

What I learned is that more and more institutions prefer structural co-operation with a selection of other institutions abroad.

I also learned that co-operation within Europe was often preferred because of the possibility of easy exchanges of students. No Visa, no work permits are required. And that relations with institutions outside Europe were chosen when that was considered necessary for the subject and the quality of the teaching.

I also learned that the newly implemented student monitor systems in universities facilitate the registration of ECTS acquired abroad. That opens perspectives for meaningful data collection, I think.

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That is how we are on our way. But recently also a new government was installed which started to cut budgets. Government expenses need to be cut by 18 billion Euros.

The proposals made to Parliament are: students that study more than one year longer than the nominal duration both at Bachelor level and at Master level, have to pay higher tuition fees. For studies at second cycle level, the masters, only loans will be provided, no more grants.

Subsidies are cut. That means: no more funding of the Huygens mobility scheme for excellent students. No more additional funding to universities to engage students from minority groups in the learning process.

In accordance with the external advice we received, the government aims for more diversity of the institutions and programmes to encompass a greater number and a more diverse student body.

The block grant funding system will be amended to shift to funding of quality in stead of quantity of students and graduates.

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The steering group continues its work.

We note that it is sometimes helpful when students in The Netherlands and in European bodies (ESU, the European Student Union) go for the same goals both in the BFUG and in The Netherlands, and so are interactions with the universities and the European University Association, and with EURASHE.

The steering group has also been used to look at the data provided for reporting on the Bologna Process, which had to be handed in by the end of April.

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We tend to say: the structure is in place, and we need to fine-tune the implementation.

This all needs to be done within the institutions, where learning outcomes are, or should be, at the heart of each programme or subject to be taught. And these learning outcomes have to be assessed, put on the Diploma Supplement, checked by accreditation or other quality assurance, transformed into curricula as courses with a number of ECTS, thus a programme can show its profile.

It is essential that governors of institutions ensure implementation, and staff does it.

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In the Netherlands Bologna experts, enthusiastic staff of institutions and students function to stimulate and coach or train their colleagues.

For exchange of students recognition of Diploma's is important. This is done according to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which means accept if the Diploma would give access in the home country, or motivate the substantial difference in case a student would not be accepted.

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To conclude I remind of the aims of all this:

To improve the quality of higher education and research also via internationalisation, for Innovation.

To ensure that graduates are fit for an international labour market, and enterprises which act globally.

To ensure that higher education and research is also attractive for foreigners who are motivated to join the group and contribute to its development.

To reduce drop out-rates, seek differentiation and provide coaching for students who need that.

To enable that the education on offer is transparent - possibly also helped by U-Multirank, a feasibility study funded by the European Commission on indicators for quality of higher education

Will we be successful and will higher education facilitates innovative and competitive economies, we aim for it and the future will tell the outcome.

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I shared my experience with you and I am very curious what is going on here in Russia, in relation to governance, and implementing the elements of higher education. It are these joint efforts which foster and structure the European Higher Education Area.

Thank you for your attention.

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