

## Private Universities & Bologna

### Implementing Bologna – the First Decade

The *Bologna Ministerial Anniversary Conference*, which takes place in the next few days in Vienna and Budapest, is an opportunity for stocktaking: How did the Bologna idea evolve? This special edition of the ÖAR newsletter focuses on the implementation of the Bologna goals in the private university sector.

#### Private universities

##### ... ‚grown up‘ with Bologna

‚Bologna‘ is a byword for a reform process of the higher education area whose implementation and effects have been recently scrutinised rather critically. Just like the Bologna process the private university sector in Austria came into being ten years ago. What does this imply for the relation between private universities and Bologna reform?

For the public universities Bologna mainly means a reorganisation of long-established models. This change is often perceived as a forced reform. The private universities in Austria are in a completely different position – they have ‚grown up‘ with Bologna. Right from the start, this sector has been integrated into a system of external quality assurance, i.e. accreditation. ECTS, modularisation and the three-cycle-system have been requirements for the private universities ‚ab ovo‘. This sector had not to face such complicated system conversion. However, that doesn't lead necessarily to a completely uncritical acceptance of the Bologna standards by private universities

##### ... Bachelor-Master structure implemented

The Austrian private universities offer 61 bachelor and 50 master programmes. The only exceptions are medical studies (human medicine/dentistry) and catholic theology which remain diploma programmes. The nine doctoral study programmes of private universities have already been partly re-structured into new three-year programmes. This adaptation has to be carried out by all private universities after institutional re-accreditation at the latest.

#### The role of accreditation

The requirement of accreditation has been a crucial factor during implementing the Bologna goals because these standards are integrated into the ÖAR's criteria for accreditation. What does this mean in practice?

##### Example: Feasibility

A main criticism against Bologna which has been raised all over Europe is the danger of overloading and over-regulating the curricula. That's why for accreditation a private university has to provide evidence that (among other things)

- the programme is feasible with regard to work load and planned length of study
- the structure of the academic programme offers sufficient space for independent reflection and analysis of the study contents

##### Example: ECTS

ECTS is the ‚currency‘ which should ensure the transfer of course-achievement within the Bologna area and therefore is an important basis for student mobility. Thus one criterion for accreditation is an adequate and comprehensible allocation of credit points.

##### Example: Modularisation

Modularisation means that subject areas are summed up to fit a theme and timeframe in balanced, self-coherent units. Main advantages are the course-related examination system and the possibility to impart study content and competencies in a more structured way. Hence the modularisation of the curriculum is another prerequisite for accreditation.

## Example: Employability and Learning Outcomes

Employability is one of the goals in creating the European higher education area. The curricula of private universities have to consider this aspect explicitly. Qualification goals for the study programme as a whole as well as for the single modules and courses have to be formulated: Not only course contents, but especially knowledge, skills und competences which should be imparted through the study programme, are focused within the curricula review by the ÖAR.

## Example: Transparency and Recognition

The ÖAR is cooperating with other accreditation agencies throughout Europe to achieve mutual recognition ([www.ecaconsortium.net](http://www.ecaconsortium.net)). This facilitates the cross-border recognition of accredited academic degrees, the establishment of Joint Programmes and the offering of study programmes across national borders. The European database Qrossroads ([www.qrossroads.eu](http://www.qrossroads.eu)) has been created as an instrument to provide transparent information on accredited study programmes

## Example: Student Involvement

The Berlin Communiqué of the European ministers of education (2003) notes that "Students are full partners in higher education governance." Hence a private university has to prove that students are involved in the design, realization, evaluation and implementation of quality management processes.

To ensure good study conditions and organisation the ÖAR appoints student experts for re-accreditation procedures who can evaluate these issues from a student's perspective.

## International experts review

The compliance with the above mentioned criteria is not only checked on paper: The ÖAR appoints international expert teams to discuss the application with the responsible private university representatives during a site-visit. Thus private universities receive a critical feedback from internationally renowned colleagues that contributes considerably to improved and refined curricula.

### BOLOGNA at a glance:

In June 1999 29 European ministers of education signed the Bologna declaration. The following goals have been agreed upon:

- Implementation of a system of easy comprehensible and comparable degrees
- Implementation of a two-cycle study system (bachelor/master)
- Implementation of a credit system (e.g. ECTS)
- Facilitating mobility and overcoming obstacles for freedom of movement
- Facilitating European cooperation in quality assurance and evaluation
- Facilitating the European dimension within the higher education sector

Ever since the ministers of education meet biennially (Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005, London 2007, Leuven/Louvain-La Neuve 2009), to further develop the action lines. These are for example

- Lifelong Learning
- facilitating the attractiveness of the European higher education area , the social dimension and student involvement
- Inclusion of doctoral studies as third cycle into the new study system
- Developing national qualifications frameworks and Bologna beyond 2010
- Employability