POLICY UPDATE HIGHER EDUCATION 28 OCTOBER 2008

Overall aim: Modernising Universities as part of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs

EU Member States support the need for reforms identified by the Commission in the May 2006 Communication "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation". The reform should help European higher education to perform better:

- **Curricular reform** (Bologna): The three cycle system (bachelor-master-doctorate), competence based learning, flexible learning paths, recognition, mobility.
- **Governance reform**: University autonomy, strategic partnership including with enterprises, quality assurance.
- **Funding reform**: Diversified sources of university income, better link to performance, promoting equity, access and efficiency, including the possible role of tuition fees, grants and loans.

The Agenda was confirmed most recently in the Council Resolution of 23 November 2007 on Modernising Universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy. The Commission will publish a report on the implementation of this Resolution in October 2008.

The Commission works with Member States and the higher education sector to help implement the modernisation agenda through what is called the Open Method of Coordination (involving dialogue among clusters of policy makers and experts, peer-learning activities, indicators, benchmarks, reports and analyses), by taking special initiatives (Quality Assurance, ECTS, EQF, EIT etc.) and by supporting the initiatives of others (pilot projects, associations, networks etc.) through the actions programmes, Lifelong Learning Programme, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus etc.

The Commission is reflecting with the Member States on the Lisbon Strategy post 2010. The reflection will culminate in a Communication by the end of this year on an education and training strategy at all levels. The overall aim is to raise skills levels through lifelong learning, and within that: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of provision and outcomes; promoting equity and citizenship; and enhancing innovation and creativity at all levels of education and training. In parallel, the reflection on Bologna post 2010 has started with a Bologna seminar in May 2008 in Gent. Mrs Odile Quintin suggested to concentrate on the three issues: qualifications for the future, attractiveness and mobility for all. Minister Vandenbroucke, in his closing speech, suggested the related topics of transparency, social responsibility and responsiveness, and global attractiveness. The debate will continue at the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) meetings and should lead to conclusions by the 46 Ministers in Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve in April 2009.

**Recent developments at European level**

1) European leaders at the European Summit in March invited the Commission "to present a comprehensive assessment of future skills requirements in Europe up to 2020, taking account of technological change and ageing populations, and to propose steps to anticipate future needs". We have launched work on this assessment. A University-Business Forum was launched in March 2008 to promote cooperation on curriculum development, continuing education and governance.

2) The Recommendation for the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong Learning (EQF) has been adopted in April 2008 following the earlier adoption of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area in 2005. The work on implementing both frameworks at national level has started. All countries aim to integrate both sets of references and to provide single frameworks for their national systems of education and training (in some countries regional frameworks will co-exist). The Commission will support the networking of national bodies responsible for the implementation and will do so in cooperation with the Council of Europe, which has a similar mandate for the higher education framework.
Universities now have the complex task of translating the European and national references into subject specific and generic learning outcomes for their curricula and course catalogues. Some inspiration they may get from the work of the project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. National Teams of Bologna Experts are being trained on how to write and use learning outcomes.

The European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR) has been launched in March 2008. The Commission supports this stakeholders' initiative, which is backed by both the Bologna Ministers and the EU (Recommendation February 2006). We expect the Register to grow and to become a valuable source of information for stakeholders within and outside Europe.

The European Consortium for Accreditation, an active sub-group of ENQA members, has launched a Commission supported database called Qrossroads (with a Q), which contains quality reviews made by Agencies, plus summaries called Accreditation Statements. A growing number of agencies is expected to put their reviews on this site.

The Commission has decided, after consulting the LLP Committee, to re-launch the ECTS Label and the DS label for outstanding performance in recognition and transparency practice. There will be a national pre-selection and the first deadline is 15 January 2009. Opening up the labels for third country applicants could be considered for future years.

Two pilot projects on Classification and Ranking have been carried out and the Commission is now considering to support the design of an independent comprehensive global ranking system which would map the diversity of universities' missions and performances, including education, research, internationalisation and community outreach.

The Commission (DG Research in collaboration with EUROSTAT and the Education and Culture DG) will select a consortia which will help to design a European Database on Higher Education Institutions, based on the work already undertaken by the National Statistical Offices.

The OECD will start a feasibility study on the Assessment Higher Education learning outcomes (AHELO). This could eventually lead to a kind of 'PISA' for Higher Education. The EU can contribute to this exercise by offering its experience with learning outcomes, gained through the qualifications frameworks and the Tuning project.

The Commission has asked a group of high level experts to examine how we can substantially increase mobility, not only for students but also for young artists, entrepreneurs and adult learners. How can we break through the glass ceiling and make mobility more attractive? The Report has been presented in June 2008 and the mobility theme will be taken further under the forthcoming French Presidency of the EU. Mobility should become a standard element of each curriculum.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has been carrying out lending operations with national and regional authorities to develop and support student loan schemes with a view to widening access to higher education within certain countries and regions. The Commission is examining with the EIB, how to promote a wider use of this facility both for access and mobility.

Bologna Ministers have adopted in London in May 2007 the Strategy "The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting" dealing with areas such as information, promotion, partnerships, mobility, recognition and policy dialogue. The Strategy builds to a large extent on EU policies and programmes, notably Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. Ministers in London also acknowledged that "efforts have been made in some countries in other parts of the world to bring their higher education systems more closely into line with the Bologna framework". Up to twenty Bologna third countries will be invited to take part in a "Bologna World Forum", which will meet in conjunction with the Ministerial Conference in Leuven, Louvain-La-Neuve, 28/29 April 2009.