



# *PROFILE of ...*

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TWO DECADES OF REFORM  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE:  
1980 ONWARDS



EDUCATION  
AND CULTURE  

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EUROPEAN  
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<i>Two Decades of Reform in Higher Education in Europe: 1980 Onwards</i>	

# **ABBREVIATIONS**

## ***Country codes***

EU	European Union
B	Belgium
B fr	Belgium - French Community
B de	Belgium - German-speaking Community
B nl	Belgium - Flemish Community
DK	Denmark
D	Germany
EL	Greece
E	Spain
F	France
IRL	Ireland
I	Italy
L	Luxembourg
NL	Netherlands
A	Austria
P	Portugal
FIN	Finland
S	Sweden
UK	United Kingdom
E/W	England and Wales
NI	Northern Ireland
SC	Scotland
EFTA/EEA	European Free Trade Association/European Economic Area
IS	Iceland
LI	Liechtenstein
NO	Norway

## **INTRODUCTION**

Across all European countries, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dawning realisation that a high level of education had become a prerequisite for the cultural, social and economic welfare of democratic societies led to a keen interest in higher education policy. Supported by the political will for closer European-wide cooperation, the higher education policies of different nations have increasingly been the subject of comparison.

The aim of this Eurydice study, *Two Decades of Reform in Higher Education in Europe: 1980 Onwards*, is to examine reforms in the higher education sector in the fifteen EU Member States and the three EFTA/EEA countries between 1980 and 1998, and to identify the main trends together with the areas of convergence and divergence across the different countries.

## **MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

In all European countries, rapid technological advances have led to the transition from production-based to knowledge-based societies. In a period when international economic and cultural relations are steadily gaining in importance, a crucial resource for any country in order to maintain its position in a fiercely competitive global market is a highly educated workforce. Equally, education has long since been recognised as central to the social stability characterising prosperous and peaceful nations. Consequently, governments as well as higher education institutions feel the need to examine the experiences of their peers abroad before embarking on significant changes to their own systems. With the deepening of European-wide integration, an understanding of these experiences determines the success of European countries in equipping their citizens for operation in the resulting multi-cultural environment. An enriched insight into such experiences also supports the coordination of European efforts aimed at promoting a system of higher education with a European dimension.

A study of this type, which draws together developments in higher education systems towards the end of the second millennium, examining the specific approaches and mechanisms employed by different countries to reform their systems, is intended to fill a hitherto unmet need for an overview of different national experiences in a European context. It is envisaged that such a study should serve as a useful reference for decision-makers in their search for workable solutions to higher education development issues as well as an informational aid to all those with an interest in the higher education milieu.

In recent years, interest in the issue of convergence across European higher education systems has grown, centring around whether this is a real or perceived phenomenon and, if real, which factors have influenced it. The need to lend direction to this debate by providing a factually based analysis of developments, and one which encompasses all of the EU and EFTA/EEA countries, is another motivation behind the study.

## ***A FEW METHODOLOGICAL MARKERS***

The comparative analysis (Part I) of the study summarised in this brochure has been written by the Eurydice European Unit in close cooperation with the National Units of the Eurydice Network and their national experts in the field of higher education. It was prepared on the basis of both extensive consultation with these national partners and the national descriptions (Part II) which they contributed.

For the purposes of this study, higher education was defined as all post-secondary education for which at least an upper secondary school-leaving certificate or equivalent is required and which leads to a higher-level qualification. It comprises courses classified at new ISCED 97<sup>1</sup> levels 5 and 6.

The study undertakes an in-depth exploration of the trends in higher education reform across 18 European countries over the last 20 years by drawing together the legislative and policy instruments deployed in this field and discussing their aims and outcomes. Underlying the study is the recognition that different factors

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<sup>1</sup> International Standard Classification for Education.

in participating country affected their points of departure and progress in higher education reform throughout the period. However, crucial too is the recognition that all shared the same catalysts for reform emanating from internal as well as wider pressures, such as an increase in demand for higher education, restrictions in public spending, the globalisation of economies and technological advances.

In the study, policy documents are defined as policy-formulating instruments, while legislation is considered as a policy-enforcing instrument. While initially setting out the historical, socio-economic, political and demographic background to the evolution of higher education systems during the period, the study proceeds to a closer analysis structured around 5 dimensions of the topic: legislation for change; management, finance and control; access and wastage; curriculum and teaching; and internationalisation.

From this, a synopsis of the general lines of development of higher education systems is derived. This is presented in terms of areas of convergence and divergence across the different countries.

## ***THE ADVENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION***

The granting of greater autonomy to institutions, particularly in institutional governance, budget spending and course-planning was intended to promote an entrepreneurial spirit and thus promote efficiency, cost-effectiveness and flexibility in the light of scarce public resources.

### ***Increase in institutional autonomy***

The notion of subsidiarity marking current European political thinking has also had its effect in the sphere of higher education governance. During the two decades examined, governments moved away from prescriptive legislative measures towards the adoption of broader legal frameworks for institutional management issues, thereby moving the locus of decision-making nearer to those directly affected by it.



In practical terms, this increase in autonomy manifested itself in a number of areas. The competencies of senior institutional governing bodies expanded beyond mere internal management into the areas of budget management, staff appointments, external contract management, responsibility for course planning and institutional development strategies.

While related to new political views on decentralisation, the motivation for the shift towards greater institutional empowerment is also partly rooted in economic causes. By empowering higher education institutions, the intention was to create flexibility. Such flexibility would enable the sector to react to the financial conditions arising as a result of restrictions in public spending. It would also facilitate competitiveness and responsiveness to the changing demands of economic life and the workplace by focusing education and research on required new skills and technologies.

### ***The onset of new funding approaches***

While certain changes in funding reflect the granting of greater freedom to higher education institutions, others are an expression of the two-pronged government strategy of ensuring equitable distribution of finance while encouraging efficiency and competition. The trend towards funding methods which enabled institutions to determine their own spending priorities, was often coupled with the introduction of formula-based funding approaches relating to input (number of students or courses offered) and, more recently, to output (number of exams passed or degrees awarded). Moreover, almost across the board, institutions were encouraged to seek alternative sources of funding on the open market.

## Two Decades of Reform in Higher Education in Europe: 1980 Onwards

Table 1: Reforms in the financing of higher education and the year the most recent relevant legislation came into force

Country	Awarding of block grants	Formula-based funding		Contract-based funding	Tuition / registration fees
		Primarily input-based	Primarily output-based		
European Union					
B fr Universities <i>Hautes écoles</i>	pre-1980 1996	pre-1980 1996	(-) (-)	(-) 1995	pre-1980 pre-1980
B nl	pre-1980	pre-1980	(-)	1995	pre-1980
DK	1993	pre-1980	1980	1985	(-)
D	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)
EL	1982	1982	1997	1982	(-)
E	1983	1983	(-)	1983	1983
F	1984	pre-1980	(-)	1984	pre-1980
IRL	pre-1980	pre-1980	(-)	pre-1980	1995
I	1993	1993	(-)	1993	1994
L	1997	(-)	1997	1997	(-)
NL	1985	pre-1980	1993	1983	1993
A	1993	(-)	(-)	pre-1980	(-)
P	1988	1994	(-)	1988	1997
FIN	1988	1986	1994	pre-1980	(-)
S	pre-1980	pre-1980	1993	(-)	(-)
UK	pre-1980	pre-1980	1992	pre-1980	1998
EFTA/EEA					
IS	1990	1990	(-)	1997	pre-1980
LI	1992	1992	(-)	1992	pre-1980
NO	1991	1991	(-)	1988	(-)

(-) Not applicable

Source: Eurymdice.

- Belgium (B fr): Contract-based funding: only a small amount of contracts relate to teaching services. Formula-based funding: although applicable to the *Hautes écoles* before 1980, this way of financing was extended in 1996.
- Germany: Awarding of block grants and formula-based funding: the Higher Education Framework Act was amended in 1998 to allow for the introduction of block grants and formula-based funding. Tuition/registration fees: in 14 of the 16 *Länder* no fees are charged. In 1996, only 2 *Länder* (Baden-Württemberg, Berlin) introduced registration fees. In 1997 Baden-Württemberg introduced tuition fees for students extending the standard period of study by 2 years.
- Greece: Formula-based funding: output-based financing has not yet been implemented.
- Austria: Contract-based funding: passed in 1975 the law was extended in 1987.
- Sweden: Awarding of block grants: since 1993/94 one single block grant has been awarded for undergraduate studies.
- Norway: Output-based funding: this type of funding constitutes a negligible part of total funding. Contract-based funding: although the use of this type of funding dates back to before 1980, regulations governing this type of funding were introduced only in 1988.

By the end of 1997, all countries, to a greater or lesser extent, had moved towards the allocation of funding in the form of lump-sum or block grants, representing substantially greater freedom for the institutions in the distribution of finance between different budget lines.

The often simultaneous introduction of formula-based funding replaced a reliance on past funding levels and heralded greater fairness in the distribution of finance between institutions. At the same time, these funding models facilitated government steering of course offers, with financial incentives for particular courses, such as those oriented towards skills in short supply. Most countries have adopted a completely input-based system, but Denmark, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom are also linking funding to specific outputs. Denmark and Sweden have gone one step further, linking it to actual student performance during the current year rather than a projection of this based on previous years' results.

Institutional enterprise and competition were further promoted by imposing the need to seek an increasing proportion of higher education finance through contract-based funding, whereby institutions, in addition to providing research, also offered their teaching expertise for a fee according to market/client needs. This phenomenon was evident in all countries excluding Germany. If contracts with central or regional government did not always involve competitive bidding, as did those with external, non-public organisations, a stimulus to efficiency and endeavour was often the close monitoring of their output.

Some countries further explored the tuition fees option for obtaining additional funding, and this manifested itself mainly in the form of substantial fee increases. As part of their increased autonomy, institutions were granted the right to decide on how this income should be used. Students were asked to pay for a higher proportion of educational costs in Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom. However, governments in these countries took great care that the levying of fees would not infringe on the right to equal access to higher education by providing adequate support for low-income families. It was a similar concern for equal access which was the spur to Ireland's abolition of student-paid tuition fees in the mid-1990s.

## **Quest for efficiency**

Economic circumstances, such as the recession periods of the 1980s experienced by most of the countries considered and, for some, the need for financial stringency measures to meet the Maastricht criteria for European Monetary Union, took their toll on higher education financing. Integral to the shift towards new funding approaches as a way of dealing with this was the quest for cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

The aim of granting institutions greater autonomy and at the same time holding them accountable for the use of public funds was to increase efficiency in higher education.

In linking funding to output, institutions are rewarded for producing certain numbers of (employable) graduates within a given time-frame. In order to avoid wasting precious resources, institutions were encouraged to liaise with each other and the labour market in relation to course offers and study places. Some measures brought about changes in course structure, involving the shortening of courses or the introduction of intermediate qualifications. Under the increasingly popular modular systems, credit could be conferred in stages, facilitating course-switching without forfeiting recognition of attainment so far.

Another manifestation of the quest for efficiency is that certain government measures were aimed at improving study completion rates and times. Institutions were encouraged to improve information, ongoing support and guidance to reduce dropout.

For students, the relationship between financial support and progress came into being or intensified in a number of countries in the 1990s. In some countries, the availability of aid or the conditions attached to it are now subject to a time-limit, set during the last two decades. Others now link aid in the next year to performance in previous years. In some countries, students started to be financially rewarded for outstanding performance in combination with timely graduation.

## ***An improved interface with economic life***

The cultural shift in higher education also brought about increased interaction between institutions and their economic environment.

On the one hand, in most countries, this resulted from the inclusion of members of the business community on the institutions' management teams, sometimes an obligation imposed on them by the Government in tandem with the granting of greater independence from public authorities.

On the other, this resulted from higher education institutions' increasing exposure to market pressures. With institutions evermore dependent on the financial support of sponsors, students and consultancy contracts with the private and public sectors, institutions aimed to add employment value to their range of qualifications and gradually adapted courses according to external feedback and their increased awareness of the requirements of economic life. This close cooperation proved particularly beneficial to the development of certain regions, as in France, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom, Iceland and Norway.

Interaction between higher education and economic life was further enhanced by including work placements in a rising number of study programmes. While vocationally oriented courses had all along offered their students the chance to gain practical experience, universities now started to realise the advantage of such training to their graduates in the search for employment.

Bearing in mind the importance of life-long learning and the expansion of credit-based study programmes, which enable students of all ages to combine or alternate between study and employment, the interface between higher education and economic life is likely to be strengthened in the future.

## **QUALITY: A DEEPENING CONCERN**

Devolution of power over the spending of their budgets to higher education institutions was accompanied by the introduction of a considerably more formalised process of quality evaluation.

In placing the responsibility for decision-making in a wider range of areas into the hands of higher education institutions, an emergent issue was how to balance greater institutional power with the need for accountability in their use of public funds and the maintenance of quality.

As government relaxed its reins on institutions in relation to budget spending choices, the focus of its actions became the maintenance of control, albeit at a distance, over the quality of their educational provision. In a number of countries, governments and institutions decided to solicit the support of the business and student community.

Since 1984, all countries studied<sup>2</sup> have introduced a systematic nationally-defined process of quality evaluation into higher education. In the 1990s, the emphasis was on taking the evaluation of teaching and learning out of the hands of the institutions alone. While self-evaluation is still an important feature of quality evaluation, it has evolved to incorporate peer review and comparative assessment on a national or cross-institutional basis.

All countries<sup>3</sup> installed a central monitoring agency to oversee, coordinate and follow up these activities. In the majority of countries, the resulting evaluation reports were made public while in a minority they were destined only for the Ministry or the institutional governing body. While these monitoring agencies were, in the majority of cases, non-ministerial, they generally had ministerial links enabling government steering through the setting of higher education standards. Only in the United Kingdom did the outcome of the evaluation have a bearing on the allocation of funding.

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<sup>2</sup> In the French Community of Belgium, such a system is at the planning stage.

<sup>3</sup> In Liechtenstein, the size of higher education forbids such a move.

Table 2: Aspects of nationally defined systems for the evaluation of higher education institutions in place in 1996/97

Country	Year current process introduced	Evaluating body				Evaluation reports made available to	Central monitoring agency
		Institution concerned	Academic community	Business community	Students		
European Union							
B fr	(-)						
B nl	1991	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	<i>Vlaams Interuniversitaire Raad (VLIR)</i>
DK	1992	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	<i>Evalueringscenteret</i>
D	1991	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	Several agencies at Land level
EL	1997	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs	<i>Simvoulia Ekpedefikis Aksiologisis ke programmatismou (CEPE)</i>
E	1995	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	<i>Consejo de Universidades</i>
F	1984	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	<i>Comité National d'Évaluation (CNE)</i>
IRL	1997	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	Higher Education Authority
I	1993	Yes	Yes	No	No	Ministry of Universities and Scientific and Technological Research	<i>Osservatorio per la valutazione</i>
L	1997						<i>Conseil national de l'enseignement supérieur</i>
NL	1993	Yes	Yes	No	No	Public	<i>Vereniging van Universiteiten (VSNU)</i> <i>HBO-raad, Vereniging van hogescholen</i>
A	1993	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Rector of institution concerned. In case of cross-university evaluations, reports are made public.	<i>Fachhochschulrat</i> (for the <i>Fachhochschulen</i> ) and <i>Universitätskuratorium</i> (for universities)
P	1994	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	<i>Conselho Nacional de Avaliação</i>
FIN	1991	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	<i>Korkeakoulujen arviointineuvosto</i>
S	1993	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	<i>Högskoleverket</i>
UK	1992	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Public	UK (E/W): as of 1997 Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) UK (NI): till 1999 Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), thereafter Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (DHFETE) UK (SC): Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC)
EFTA/EEA							
IS	1997	Yes	Yes	No	No	Public	Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
LI	1997	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Institution concerned	(-)
NO	1992	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Public	<i>Norsk institutt for studier av forskning og utdanning (NIFU)</i>

(-) Not applicable

Source: Eurydice.

Belgium (B fr): The Decree of 5 August 1995 provides for the introduction of self-evaluation at the *Hautes écoles*.

Germany: The individual *Länder* take different approaches.

Greece: The systems for self-evaluation and the evaluation by students are not yet fully implemented.

## Two Decades of Reform in Higher Education in Europe: 1980 Onwards

Spain:	Following the pilot programme 'Evaluation of the Quality of the University System' during the period from 1992 to 1994.
Italy:	Self-evaluation is mainly concerned with financial control.
Luxembourg:	A comprehensive evaluation system of public higher education is currently being developed.
The Netherlands:	There is only programme evaluation, but no institutional evaluation.
Norway:	In 1992, a 5-year pilot project was initiated by the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs with nation-wide evaluations of five selected study disciplines (business administration, sociology, engineering, mathematics and music).

### **ACCOMMODATING A DIVERSE STUDENT BODY**

The increased intake of students has had a marked influence on the diversity of students, entering or re-entering higher education at different stages of their lives, and has forced and will continue to force institutions to reconsider their admission policies and learning pathways to suit the varied expectations and life-styles of the student body.

### ***Widening access***

The policy of promoting participation in higher education by all citizens with the necessary capabilities is based on the knowledge that personal fulfilment in educational terms leads to social cohesion and cultural advancement and that a highly skilled workforce is a prerequisite for sustaining competitiveness in a global market.

In all countries studied, the standard basic requirement for entry to higher education was traditionally the successful completion of general upper secondary education. During the past 20 years, access was progressively widened for holders of vocational secondary qualifications and to mature-age students without traditional qualifications.

Policies to facilitate the participation of this second group in particular influenced the range of available routes into higher education, with the accreditation of prior experience, first and foremost, and the passing of special entry exams and access courses being added to the array of entrance criteria in some countries.



Quotas of places or target numbers were also set for this group or for adults in general, as in Denmark, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Finland and Sweden<sup>4</sup>, while Greece prioritised such students in admissions to certain courses in the event of high demand.

## ***Inroads into life-long learning***

The need to continually update and adapt the skills of the workforce in order to keep abreast of technological change has long been recognised as a prerequisite for maintaining a competitive edge in a global economy. For individual citizens, it is a determining factor in their level of participation in cultural, social and economic activities. The significance of life-long learning for European societies is enshrined in the Treaty of Amsterdam in the preamble to the Treaty Establishing the European Community. The signatories are:

*'...determined to promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for their peoples through wide access to education and through its continuous updating.'*

A further measure of the importance of life-long learning European-wide is the inclusion of adult education and other educational pathways (Grundtvig programme) within Socrates II.

The traditional view of higher education as purely a follow-on from secondary education and preparation for first-time employment is increasingly challenged. Its role in the future will relate evermore to the continuing training of those possessing professional experience regardless of whether they are returners or first-time entrants to higher education.

Higher education provision for adults within or outside the employment network, however, calls for new educational structures flexible enough to enable students to compile programmes according to their needs and availability. Most higher education provision is still geared towards the young full-time student without any professional experience. Flexible programmes organised on a part-time, modular or distance-learning basis have encouraged the participation of those with the

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<sup>4</sup> Adults admitted under this quotas of places in Spain and Portugal must also pass a special access test.

daily commitments of family or work. In order for higher education to make the necessary contribution to continuing education as a means of learning new (or updating old) skills, these inroads will have to be further explored.

## ***Admissions policies: a tool for managing student demand***

The democratisation of access left governments and institutions with the task of matching rising demand from an increasingly diverse student body with limited institutional capacity. A general response to this was an expansion in the number of higher education places offered during the period, with more places being created mainly on vocationally-oriented courses at non-university institutions. In tandem with this expansion in institutional capacity, stringent selection criteria were imposed for admission to higher education in some contexts.

Several factors combined to influence changes in the selection of students at entry: institutional ability to expand in pace with the upsurge in student numbers, the institutions' obligation to become increasingly cost-effective with an eye to completion rates and times, the need to control the supply of certain professionals, and the concentrated demand for places on certain high-status specialist courses.

Entrance to courses such as architecture, dentistry, medicine, veterinary medicine and engineering was subject to increasingly stringent criteria in the majority of countries. In some cases, where a constitutional right to higher education exists for the holders of appropriate school-leaving qualifications, the limitation of places on these courses proved controversial and led to the testing of the legality of this in court.

Only four countries recorded major changes in selectivity for university courses. With demand outgrowing supply, Italy and Liechtenstein ended open access, leaving Austria and Luxembourg as the only two countries maintaining this policy. Denmark and Norway were able to relax their admission procedures due to the creation of new study places and new policies to redistribute applicants to institutions with spare capacity<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Greece is expected to relax its admission policies by the year 2000 due to the increased provision of study places.

Spain, on the other hand, was forced to tighten selection as it had not yet managed to sufficiently increase capacity in response to demand.

The non-university vocational sector presents a different picture with only Belgium granting open access. All countries which during the period under consideration established a vocationally-oriented higher education sector opted for high selectivity. Since these courses are tailored more closely to the needs of the labour market, effective selection at entry guarantees the suitability of candidates not only for their chosen studies but also for the relevant professional career.

Table 3. Selectivity at entry to higher education in 1980/81 and 1996/97

Non-university vocational sector		B/fr	B/nl	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	IS	LI	NO
1980/81		○	○	●	●	(-)	(-)	●	●	(-)	○	●	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	●	○	○	●
1996/97		○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	(-)	●	○	○	○
University sector		B/fr	B/nl	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	IS	LI	NO
1980/81		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●
1996/97		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○

○ Selective for no courses      ● Selective for some courses      ● Selective for most courses

(-) Not applicable

Source: Eurydice.

The table does not include specialised courses in art, music and sport as access to these courses is subject to aptitude tests in all participating countries, except France which grants open access to sports programmes.

## STRUCTURAL RENEWAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The introduction and progressive strengthening of a vocational higher education sector and the surge in open and distance education have added a new dimension to the academic landscape previously dominated by on-site university teaching and research.

The restructuring of higher education was one of the most active areas of reform, originally linked to the expansion of higher education. In addition, rapid techno-

logical change created a particular need for more higher education courses in the technical and commercial field which the traditional universities were initially reluctant or unable to cater for. This, in the majority of countries, has led to the establishment of vocational/technological institutions, introducing a binary divide between a more research-oriented university sector and a more vocationally-oriented non-university sector. Within the higher education systems in 1998, such a divide was present in all countries except Sweden, the United Kingdom and Iceland.

Vocational/technological higher education often had its origin in post-secondary education which had been upgraded by extending its length and intensifying the course content and by setting a relevant qualification structure in place. In many cases, vocational institutions were merged in order to create multi-disciplinary entities comparable in size to universities. The constant demand for this type of education from students and the business community alike, was at the heart of endeavours to raise the status of non-university education and put it on an equal legal footing with universities.

At the same time universities, which had so far paid less attention to the employability of their graduates, came under pressure to rethink their course offer in relation to content and length of study. The general trend favours the division of university programmes into independent cycles, each providing the student with the possibility of obtaining a degree. At the end of each cycle students are free to choose to continue with more research-centred studies or to enter the job market.

These moves are proof of a gradual, if albeit slow, process of convergence observed for first degree courses and their qualifications between the university and non-university higher education sectors, a rapprochement that has opened up new inter-institutional pathways for many students.

The introduction or reinforcement of open and distance learning was another significant factor influencing the structure of higher education, proving particularly advantageous to mature-age students. Programmes were divided into separate modules and their successful completion recognised by credits which could be accumulated over time to obtain a degree. The advantages of a modular structure not only to distance learning but also to on-site teaching were soon recognised by an educational community intent on promoting academic mobility. The transferability of study attainments in the form of credits opened up many pathways

between institutions in different sectors and countries and made an essential contribution to the internationalisation of higher education.

## **EUROPEAN AREA OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The political will to promote a Europe of Knowledge with its specific European system of higher education formed the basis for the Sorbonne Declaration and the Declaration of Bologna.

Since the adoption of the first Community action programme on education in 1976, the European Community, at the instigation of the European Commission, has again and again shown its interest in promoting exchange of information and cooperation within Europe. Nowadays, the Socrates programme, with its higher education arm Erasmus, forms an integral part of the educational landscape in all EU and EFTA/EEA countries as well as a growing number of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). Its positive impact on countries' mutual understanding with respect to educational issues, the promotion of European-wide cooperation and mobility, and the improvement of transparency and recognition of study attainments throughout the Community is invaluable.

In May 1998, four individual Member States (Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom) took an unprecedented initiative and issued a declaration on the harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system. The four signatories commit themselves to encouraging a common frame of reference aimed at improving external recognition of degrees and facilitating student mobility and employability.

Other European countries were quick to react to this declaration and only a year later, in June 1999, the Ministers of Education of 29 countries (15 EU, 3 EFTA/EEA, 10 associated CEECs and Cyprus) met in Bologna to sign a Joint Declaration on the European Higher Education Area. They commit themselves to coordinating their educational policies during at least the first decade of the new millennium to achieve the following objectives '*...of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide*':

- adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles
- establishment of a system of credits
- promotion of mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff
- promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
- promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

The development of this European Higher Education Area should thus consolidate European Community efforts oriented towards creating a favourable climate for enhanced cooperation in this field.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EUROPE OF TOMORROW**

With the expectation that the globalisation of the economy and technological renewal will exercise ongoing influence on European societies, the role of higher education in educating individuals with varied interests and ambitions to become responsible citizens in a democratic context and in creating an adaptable workforce can only continue to grow. The plans for future reforms communicated by the participating countries suggest the reinforcement of existing trends, including:

- widening access to students of all age groups
- promoting quality
- strengthening interaction with the business community
- promoting the economic relevance of course offers
- dividing programmes into distinct, independent cycles, each culminating with a specific degree
- modularisation of programmes and the intensified use of credit schemes
- enhanced transferability between institutions and programmes within and across national boundaries
- enhancing the readability and comparability of qualifications
- promoting life-long learning.

Higher education institutions will be asked to contribute to the local economy which in turn will be able to offer employment to their graduates. Public involve-

ment in higher education management will be further reduced, while increasing its foothold in quality assurance and control. The diversity of educational provision will be scrutinised in relation to its economic relevance by students and business alike and, last but not least, institutions will be encouraged to respond to the needs of mature-age students who wish to acquire specific new skills or reinforce old ones relevant to their professional and personal lives. The major challenge for higher education in the future will be striking the right balance between the advancement of research and development, in which it must continue to play a central role, and continual adjustment to labour market requirements.

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