Bologna Process Malta Seminars

BOLOGNA EXPERT TRAINING SESSION & LEARNING OUTCOMES SEMINAR

A Report

NATIONAL TEAM OF BOLOGNA EXPERTS MALTA 2009-2011

Bologna Process

Malta Seminars

Bologna Expert Training Session &

Learning Outcomes Seminar

A Report

National Team of Bologna Experts (2009-2011)

Preface

Dr James Calleja, Coordinator, National Team of Bologna Experts (Malta)

This document gives a detailed summary of two Bologna Seminars held as part of the Bologna Process activities for the 2009-2011 cycle. The seminars held and the reports written are a clear confirmation of Malta's commitment towards implementing the Bologna Process initiatives. Malta was one of the founding signatory countries of the Bologna Process back in 1999. Since then, Malta has been participating actively in both the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and the Bologna Ministerial Meetings. One of the main contributions given to the Bologna Process in Malta was the setting up, in 2007, of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) for Lifelong Learning. In 2010, a Referencing Report was published by the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC), which referenced the MQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF/EHEA).

In 2010 and 2011 seven *Bologna* seminars have been organised as part of the 2009-2011 cycle. The response from all stakeholders in the Education sector has been encouraging even though a '*Bologna* Culture' still needs to be instilled. The seminars have served as a contact point between stakeholders and experts in the Higher Education field. Some of the topics addressed include: Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Student-Centred Learning, Employability and Learning Outcomes. Malta's efforts to adhere to the targets set by the Bologna Process have further enhanced Malta's attractiveness as a centre of excellence in Higher Education.

I take this opportunity to thank the EUPA for organising the seminars and all national and international Bologna Experts and speakers for their active participation. Moreover I wish to thank Dr Roberta Avellino for the write-up of this report which serves as a follow-up to the seminars entitled: 'The Bologna Process: A National *Bologna* Expert Training Session', and 'Learning Outcomes: A Bologna Process Training Conference'.

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The Bologna Process:
A National *Bologna* Expert Training Session

1. Objectives of Activity

The main objectives of the National Bologna Expert Training Seminar were:

- To discuss the impacts of the challenges of the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter referred to as EHEA) on Higher Education Institutions in Malta;
- To prioritize Malta's commitments towards the implementation of the EHEA through Higher Education programmes; and
- To explore ways to better coordinate the Bologna/Copenhagen initiatives on a national level.

The subject areas mentioned above were further discussed within the three workshops carried out during the seminar.

1.1 The Target Group / Stakeholders

Participants included student representatives from the University of Malta and MCAST, lecturers from the Institute of Tourism Studies, University of Malta and MCAST, doctoral students, retired educators, representatives from the National Commission Higher Education, the National Team of Bologna Experts, representatives from the European Union Programmes Agency, Education officers, representatives from the Foundation for Educational Services, Heads and Assistant Heads of Schools, Guidance teachers, private providers and representatives from the Archbishop's Curia.

2. Presentations and Informal Discussion

2.1 Introductory Overview of the Programmes Administered by EUPA

Mr. Jamie Matthew Mercieca

Mr Jamie Matthew Mercieca provided participants with an introductory overview of the programmes being administered by the European Union Programmes Agency (hereinafter referred to as EUPA) and described the entity as a very 'complex' agency. The latter hosts:

- **The Youth in Action Programme:**

Action 1 – Youth for Europe
Youth for Europe is subdivided into three sub actions: Youth Exchanges, Youth Initiatives and Youth Democracy Projects.

Action 2 – European Voluntary Service (EVS)
Under this action, young people aged between 18 and 30, alone or in a group, are able to spend from 2 months to 1 year abroad as European volunteers to give a helping hand in local projects from a wide range of fields such as: social, ecological and environmental, arts and culture, new technologies, leisure, and sports amongst others.

Action 3 – Youth in the World
This measure supports Youth Exchanges which allow several groups of young people from Programme Countries and Partner Countries to meet and take part together in a series of activities.

Action 4 – Youth Support Measures
Action 4 provides support to develop new YOUTH projects and to enhance capacity building and innovation in the field of international youth work.

Action 5 – Support for European cooperation in the youth field
The Action is sub-divided in 3 sub-Actions: Meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy; Support for activities to bring about better understanding and knowledge in the field of youth and; Cooperation with International Organisations.

- **The Lifelong Learning Programme,** which includes Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig;
- **The Euro Mediterranean Youth Platform; and**
- **The Bologna Process**: Bologna Experts are funded by the European Commission and are appointed by the National Authorities of the country concerned.

2.2 Introduction by NTBE Coordinator – Key Objectives of the Training Session, Dr. James Calleja

Dr. James Calleja gave further information about the upcoming activities organized by the National Team of Bologna Experts. Moreover, he referred participants to the working paper distributed with the welcome packs, entitled 'The Bologna Process: An Overview' and held that further material will be distributed throughout the coming activities, with relevance to the topic being discussed during the particular forum.

The following declarations were then discussed and compared, whilst focusing on the challenges faced by Malta as a result thereof:

- The Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area (March 12, 2010)
- The Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (28-29 April, 2009)

Dr. Calleja explained that these are two separate declarations which encompass the key indicators of the Bologna Process, which the Ministers responsible for Higher Education have agreed upon. Nonetheless, it is considered imperative that these two declarations are approached and looked at together and as complementary to each other. This is due to the fact that the Declaration and Communiqué share common objectives and overlap in their final goals. This is also evidence of two distinct groups of experts coming together for a common goal.

On the other hand, the Bruges Communiqué of the 7 December 2010 also bears reference to the Copenhagen Declaration[1] and shows the adoption of:

- A global vision for VET in 2020;
- 11 strategic objectives for the period 2011-2020;
- 22 short term deliverables at national level for the period 2011-2014; and
- Governance and ownership of the Copenhagen Process.

Furthermore, the Bruges Communiqué also links with the Bologna Process in its transversal objectives, as can be seen hereunder.

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8. Coordinated governance of European and national instruments in the areas of transparency, recognition, quality assurance and mobility

In line with the above mentioned strategic objectives, coherent and complementary use of the various European and national instruments in the areas of transparency, recognition, quality assurance and mobility should be a high priority for the participating countries in the coming years. Coordinated governance of these instruments under the Copenhagen process and stronger synergy with the instruments and principles of the Bologna process are required.

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At this point, it is also apt to identify the common priorities of the Bologna and Copenhagen Declarations. Summarily, these may be listed as:

- The social dimension by ensuring equitable access, participation and completion;
- The accent on lifelong learning by providing flexible pathways;
- The structured involvement of stakeholders, which include: employers, trade unions and student representatives amongst others, whom should also be consulted regarding the implementation phases of these processes;
- The employability and direct relevance of Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training to the needs of the labour market;
- The creation of learner-centred programmes by focusing on matching learning with ability;
- Research and innovation;
- International openness by focusing on global appeal and increased harmonisation;

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1 Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training.

- Greater mobility including both vertical and horizontal;
- Increased transparency tools such as Quality Assurance, ECTS, the use of the Diploma Supplement, eLearning and the Learning Outcomes approach in programme design; and
- The decrease of early school leavers to less than 10% and the increase of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary education to an equivalence of 40%.

Undoubtedly, it is agreed that all declarations are founded upon the elements of:

- Access – Flexibility;
- Quality – Standards;
- Ownership – Stakeholders; and
- Mobility – Employability.

Dr Calleja held that, the Bologna Process is a network of European universities working towards 'institutional autonomy, academic freedom, active participation of students and staff as well as social equity'.[2] However, the Copenhagen Process has also played a crucial role in raising awareness of VET at both national and European levels[3] and thus, it is necessary to have all declarations complementing each other in scope and inclusive of both academic and vocational learning.

2.3 *The European Higher Education Area - A Journey...*

Mr Viorel Proteasa, Member of the 2010-2012 BFUG Secretariat (Then Bologna Secretariat)

The main themes of Mr Viorel Proteasa's presentation were:

- Introduction of the EHEA
- From Bologna to Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve – highlights
- Challenges within Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué

Mr Proteasa started the presentation by outlining the historical developments of the Bologna Process from Bologna in 1999 up to the conference in Bucharest, which is being held in 2012. Proteasa noted that ensuring comparability and conversions of Higher Education systems is undoubtedly a big challenge.

Mr Proteasa explained that the BFUG's work plan is currently being implemented by working groups focusing on: international openness, mobility, qualifications frameworks, recognition, social dimension and transparency tools as well as reporting on the implementation of the Bologna Process. Networks are also formed but these are much more oriented towards the sharing of experiences and good practices. Thematic sessions are being proposed to take place during BFUG sessions with the first session taking place in Budapest in spring 2011.

As a member of the BFUG Secretariat, Mr Proteasa emphasized that the main role of the Bologna Secretariat is '... to provide neutral support to further the consolidation of the EHEA under the exclusive authority of the BFUG and its Chairs and Vice Chairs'.[4] The functions of the Secretariat are therefore, to:

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2   The Bologna Process 2020 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, Preamble.

3   Draft conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the priorities for Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, 15010/10 EDUC 176 SOC 662, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 22 October 2010 p. 6

4   http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=9

- Provide administrative and operational support for BFUG, its structures and the Board;
- Create and maintain the EHEA permanent website and electronic archives; and
- Act as an internal and external contact point for the EHEA, while ensuring external representation on behalf of the Chairs or based on direct requests.

Mr Proteasa explained that during its ignition phase, the Bologna Declaration focused on the diploma supplement, the two main cycles, the system of (academic) credits, mobility, European cooperation in quality assurance and the promotion of the European dimension. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that the Bologna Process is not a binding cooperation but countries are participating on a voluntary basis. The only imposition on the countries is that of submitting reports in order to show their progress.

Mr Proteasa moved on to explain how the priorities have evolved from the Bologna action lines as listed in the 2007-2009 work plan, to the EHEA objectives as listed in the 2009-2012 post-Leuven work plan, as may be seen in the diagram hereunder. New post-Leuven priorities are identified as student-centred learning and the teaching mission of Higher Education, funding and multidimensional transparency tools.

Subsequently, the action lines were separately discussed by targeting achievements and challenges within the field of Higher Education. Amongst the most notable achievements, Mr Proteasa mentioned the ratification of the Lisbon Convention by all except four EHEA countries, the development of National Qualifications Frameworks, and the Information and Promotion Network (IPN). The action line of Quality Assurance boasts the achievements of: the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance; the European Quality Assurance Register; the European Quality Assurance Forum and; the National agencies, but faces the EU Services Directive as its main challenge.

Mr. Proteasa held that much emphasis had been placed on the social dimension of Higher Education with the main achievement being that of research on measuring inequity by eQNET. On the other hand, the main challenges within this area are those of defining under-represented groups and setting targets on: their inclusion in Higher Education at each national level; national strategies for reaching the national targets and; collecting data on inequalities. The diagram below shows the Inequality Index in Access to Tertiary Education.

Moreover, the main challenges within the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué surround the areas of lifelong learning, the recognition of prior learning, student-centred learning and the teaching mission of Higher Education, education, research and innovation, funding and multidimensional transparency tools. Challenges, amongst others, include the provision of flexible educational paths and recognition of prior learning, funding and institutional infrastructures, the links between recognition and quality assurance, the definition of student-centred learning as a policy subject and the shift towards that approach. Of course, public funding remains the main priority to guarantee equitable access and further sustainable institutional development.

2.4 Question Time and Discussion – Chaired by Dr. James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator

One of the participants started the discussion session by enquiring about the possibility of having a metaframework, catering for Higher Education which is both academic and VET. In the reply given to the participant it was explained that current discussion have been referring to Quality Assurance and that there have been informal mentions of ways and means to link Higher Education and VET. Moreover it was explained that education needs to be looked at as a journey from compulsory to adult education in order to acquire synergy between the systems and ensure that a student coming out of compulsory education does not need to start afresh in vocational education and training, since basic vocational competences would have been also acquired in compulsory education. Thus, one must assess the full spectrum of education so that people may move freely from Higher Education to VET and vice versa.

Another participant held that from his personal research it emerged that down at the grassroots, some students and teachers have not even heard of the Bologna Process. Sometimes the EHEA and the Bologna Process seem to be stuck in a bureaucratic and conceptual idea. The participant asked for information on how this issue is being translated to reach rock bottom and also asked for the proper definition of VET vs. Higher Education. In this regard, it was explained that such issues should be dealt with at a national level. What can be done is to build a website and a newsletter to send related messages directly to as many people as possible. The national agencies are responsible for promoting the Bologna Process in their countries. Countries have also set up National Bologna Follow-up Groups (BFUG) to also carry out this task, amongst others. As to binding the institutions, this is again a matter of national policy. Same examples are binding that are stimulating the institutions to adopt some practices.

Additionally, it was clarified that from a national perspective, the National Team of Bologna Experts (NTBE) is hosting activities and is trying to reach different stakeholders in the Education sector. Moreover the NTBE is also inviting international Bologna Experts to share their experiences at these seminars. It was also pointed out that the need for a better combination of a VET and Higher Education framework is also felt in other countries. There is an overlap between what is professional and vocational. It was explained that debates with designated authorities giving warrants have also been initiated on a national level. A Bachelor degree from MCAST should match the learning outcomes of a Bachelor degree from other institutions such as the University of Malta. In some countries, the combination of studies and practice is embedded in the students' educational journey. In Malta, this is only present in some courses.

On another note, another participant asked about means of binding institutions to participate and abide with the processes, decisions and results. As a reply, the implementation of the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement were highlighted as perfect examples of how institutions follow the Process' initiatives. This is a huge improvement within such a short period of time.

3. Workshops

3.1 Workshop 1 – What are the impacts of the EHEA on HEIs in Malta?

Mr Henry Mifsud and Ms Debbie Lora Dimech (Rapporteur)

The social dimension in HEIs is an important aspect that needs to be addressed. There are a few courses at the UoM, such as dentistry and physiotherapy that operate with a numerous clausus policy. Participants argued whether education should be made available to all or whether employability issues should take prevalence. It was concluded that more guidance should be provided to students not only regarding subjects and courses but also regarding employability possibilites provided at the end of each student's study period in a HEI.

During the discussion it was argued that the Maltese society does not appreciate nor promote lifelong learning. A lot of importance is shed on students finishing compulsory education and entering tertiary education. However it seems that after students finish their studies and start working, no more importance, guidance and information is given to encourage LLL. More work placements should be encouraged by HEIs, teachers and staff. Participants also noted that equal opportunities should be granted to all students before entering HEIs to continue their studies. It was agreed that more importance should be given to minority groups at secondary and post-secondary education, in both academic education and VET.

It was also pointed out that the exact definitions of the terms: 'employment', 'employability', 'skills', and 'competences' need to be defined and adhered to withing the education sector. It was noted that unfortunately many students lack the skills needed to enter and perform well within the labour market, irrespective of the qualifications that they achieve. This suggests that there is the need to provide relevant guidance to students and forecast skills needed within the labour market. It was explained that the problem of providing adequate guidance and counselling is being addressed through an ESF project, the VQPack (Vocational Qualifications Pack). The latter consists of videos and leaflets on vocational training with feedback from stakeholders to be distributed to students. The dialogue between all stakeholders also needs to be enhanced.

During the discussion it was also suggested that there should be a reform in teacher training. The people preparing the students, at all levels of education are teachers. It was noted that teachers themselves have little information on what the labour market and the industry is made of. Teachers study in schools, finish university and most of them find work immediately in a school, therefore they are not very familiar with the industry outside an education institution. It was also emphasized that Faculties and Administrative staff at university should work more hand in hand with employers in order to offer more traineeships, work placements and summer jobs. Students at the UoM cannot be experts in their fields theoretically only. Moreover there needs to be more harmony between employment positions required and the courses being offered. The importance of Continuous Professional Development was also stressed.

At the final stage of the workshop, the issue of entry requirements at the University of Malta was also brought up. Participants felt that this issue needs to be addressed as they believe the UoM cannot rely solely on MATSEC qualification and the Maturity Clause. Students need to be encouraged to move horizontally (VET to HE and vice versa). Ultimately it was concluded that: learning to learn plays a key role in achieving better participation rates at post-secondary and tertiary levels; CPD needs to be promoted further to guarantee continuous employability; students need to be equipped with the necessary competences and skills to enter and move within the labour market; and students also need to be guided towards fields relevant to Malta's socio-economic growth to secure employment.

3.2 Workshop 2 - What are Malta's priorities towards the implementation of the EHEA?

Dr Roberta Avellino and Mr Jamie Matthew Mercieca (Rapporteur)

The participants at the workshop felt that students and academics who take an interest in HE, seek information on their personal initiative. On the other hand, there is a general ambivalence towards the Bologna Process, mainly due to lack of knowledge and information about the EHEA whilst students are not aware of the significance of the Bologna Process.

Common goals between HEIs in Malta do exist, but lack of harmonisation and understanding on how to link HEIs means that the goals are not being fully reached. Some stakeholders, senior officials, decision makers and policy makers are not present for the Bologna Process meetings even though it is in their interest as stakeholders in the education sector. In this context it seems that a top down approach is predominant within the education sector. This is perceived as being a drawback to Malta's participation in the Bologna Process initiatives. Moreover, garnering support from higher authorities often proves to be very difficult and processes take a long time to be implemented. Greater collaboration is needed, but not just from bottom up. The participants in the workshop do not feel empowered to make the necessary changes.

It was pointed out that, within HEIs, more direct contact needs to be made with the students, and between different departments. The Bologna Process concept needs to be sold to decision makers. Greater outreach is needed and involvement at grassroots level as well as trans-hierarchical representation is required especially in larger institutions.

A need to sensitise colleagues as to the significance of the Bologna Process was emphasised. A more participative democracy is also alluded at. However, participants acknowledged that this takes time and perseverance. Changing mind-sets is a slow and laborious process but a realistic sense of haste is required. Therefore, more marketing and communication activities need to be carried out on a national level. There is a strong need to inform students, lecturing staff, administration and management through dissemination strategies and encourage the participation of all in the *Bologna* fora.

Other points of discussion brought up during the workshop session which were not directly linked to the topic of discussion included; (1) student centred learning systems such as "Let Me Learn" which is not being given enough attention and it seems that the educational institutions are not delving into the use of similar tools and methodologies; (2) a sense of learned helplessness exists. A number of the persons in the room felt that they did not have the support of the people in authority. Mention was also made of the people believed to be on the lowest rungs of the ladder, those who do not have an opportunity to make their voices heard. These include illiterate people who, even though skilled, are not being recognised as such. These people need a warrant to work but due to illiteracy they are unable to obtain it.

Participants agreed that on a national level, focus seems to be on academic knowledge and a "passing an exam orientation". At present most measurable qualifications are given based on written examinations only. There is a need to explore different ways of teaching and learning. The foundation of MCAST has increased opportunities for many people. It is important that students, at all levels of education, are encouraged to strive for a higher level of education.

3.3 Workshop 3 - What structures can we build in Malta between the Bologna and Copenhagen process? What structures can we build in terms of access, assurance etc?

Mr Ray Farruġia and Ms Valerie Attard (Rapporteur)

In terms of quality, it was immediately agreed that Malta requires an agency to quality assure HEIs. Quality assurance is needed to ensure that students are receiving the best educational services. Quality enhancement should permeate the whole institution through the development of programmes, recruitment and the resources being used. However, monitoring and quality assuring an institution from the teaching provided to students, to the maintenance of the building itself is not an easy task.

HEIs need to have an external agency to monitor quality. This agency must work in collaboration with training institutions. In the meantime, there is an element of quality assurance in licensing training institutions. Nonetheless, how will home-grown qualifications be quality assured? Should it be up to the Malta Qualifications Council or to the National Commission for Higher Education or should there be an external quality assurance agency? Participants agreed that since the end result needs to be translated to other countries, an external quality assurance agency is required. Of course, this should be part of the Maltese legislation as it is useless having an agency which is not enforceable. However, the 'policing' aspect of Quality Assurance has to be removed and there has to be a shift towards transparency not 'policing'. The current trend is to talk about quality enhancement and not quality assurance.

What about the legal obligations on the part of the institution to have quality assurance mechanisms? At the University of Malta a survey sheet is used, giving an indication of the performance of lectures from a student's perspective. External verifiers are also called in to look at the quality of students' work and their final classification. In the case of TEFL schools there is the EFL monitoring board and FELTOM. All schools are legally recognised by the education department but not all schools are recognised by FELTOM.

Quality assurance also enhances mobility and employability. Vertical mobility is usually discussed (Malta to a foreign country) however, other kinds of mobility such as the movement from VET to HE are still new to Malta's educational system. Internal mobility within University is blocked (there are a few optional study units but these are very limited) and this impinges upon employability.

Ultimately it was concluded that the divide between Academic and Professional Qualifications should not be there whilst a VET institution should not duplicate courses offered by UoM and vice versa. There should be a forum of HE institutions and entities within the industry, where stakeholders gather to discuss problems, alongside student representatives.

3.4 Final Remarks on Workshops

Mr. Proteasa concluded the session by reiterating that the mission of the Universities should not simply be that of providing employability, research and knowledge to its students but to provide knowledge to members of a democratic society. It is important that this is not secondary, but ancillary to the functions of the Universities. In the meantime, it is also essential to strengthen the relationships between Universities and the market, industry and society, since study programmes are basic units of action. At the same time, one must be careful in assessing these needs as institutions must be autonomous not simply vis-à-vis governments but also in relation to market and the industry.
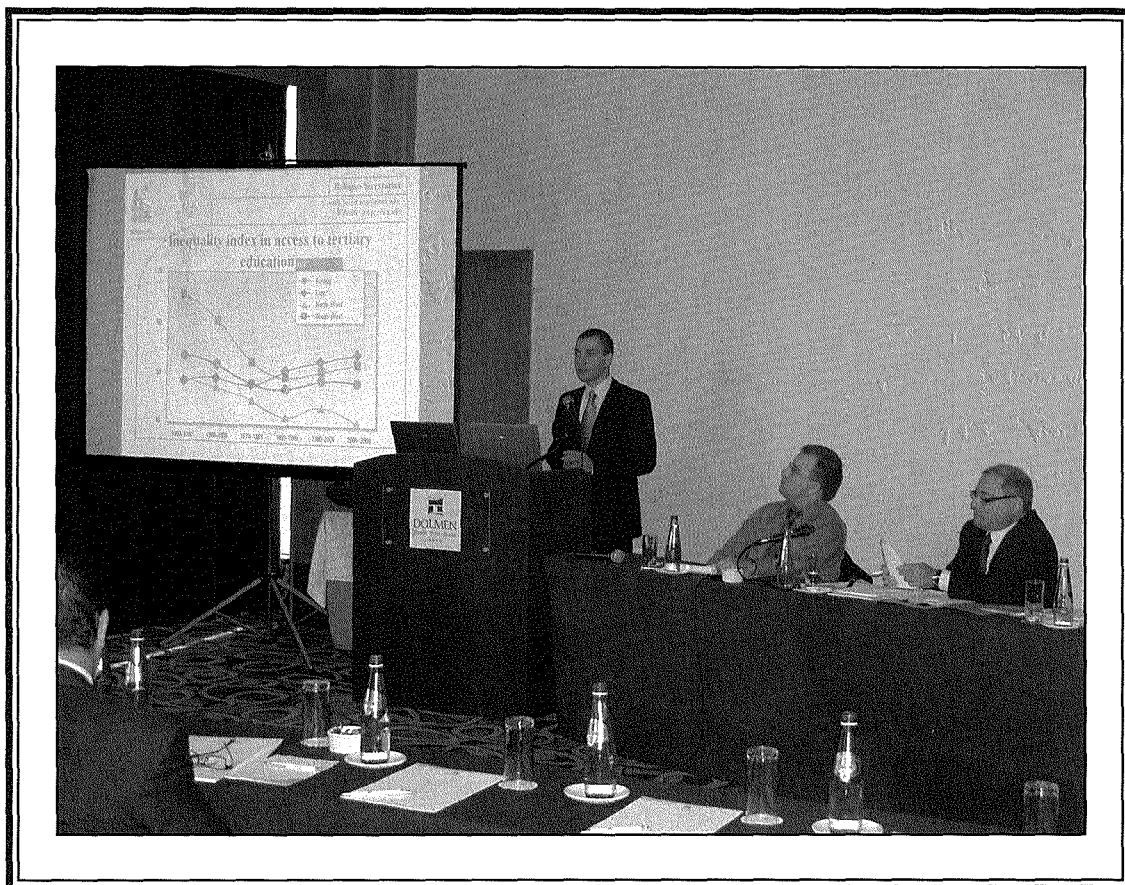
4. Closing remarks
Dr. James Calleja

Dr. Calleja held that, reform is certainly a challenge and that it calls for stakeholders in the education sector to instigate the need for change, own it and give guidelines on how and what is necessary to change. He explained that reform is a selective process and that it needs to be carried out only where necessary. Dr. Calleja also explained that there is also the need to provide and disseminate information on the Bologna Process and to increase participation, especially of those who are in decision making positions. This is a very important issue as the National Bologna Experts are also decision makers.

Dr. Calleja insisted that the structures discussed in workshop 3 showed that the set up of the Quality Assurance Agency is an urgent necessity. Laws have been prepared alongside legislation that would give force to the Malta Qualifications Framework. Many countries have not fulfilled this task as yet but the Minister of Education, Employment and the Family is very keen on moving into this direction. Nonetheless, attention is required vis-à-vis the learning to learn process, the socio-economic aspects of the Bologna Process and the need to prepare learners to face the challenges of an ever-changing learning process.

4.1   Outcomes of the meeting

The outcomes and conclusions of the seminar are reflected within the reports presented by the rapporteurs in each workshop, whereby participants shared good practices and raised concern about obstacles encountered in their respective fields of expertise. Nonetheless, the main outcomes of the discussions held were based on the lack of visibility of Bologna Experts and thus, the lack of awareness and information about the Bologna Process as well as the need for better coordination between institutions for a harmonized and standardized system on a national level. On the other hand, the social dimension and aspects of Higher Education were emphasized as being intertwined within a student's potentiality and capability of obtaining higher qualifications in both Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education.

The seminar was well attended by a number of stakeholders coming from different fields. A number of points were raised, which merit appropriate follow up from the National Team of Bologna Experts. The concrete recommendations proposed by the participants should also be given their due attention.

4.2   Recommendations

The participants of 'The Bologna Process: A National Bologna Expert Training Session' bring forward the following recommendations:

- To provide guidance and forecast skills both to students and educators;
- To strengthen dialogue between all stakeholders in the field of Higher Education;
- To carry out a reform in teacher training;
- To achieve more harmonization between employment positions required in the workforce and the courses being offered in Higher Education;
- To promote further collaboration between faculties and administrative staff at university and employers in order to offer more traineeships, work placements and summer jobs;
- To promote and stress the importance of Continuous Professional Development;

- To address the issue of entry requirements at the University of Malta;
- To establish direct communication with students and lecturers at institutions such as MCAST;
- To reach out and encourage participation at grassroots level;
- To market and promote the activities being carried out by the National Team of Bologna Experts;
- To advocate for the setting up of a national Quality Assurance Agency in Malta; and
- To create a forum whereby, Higher Education Institutions as well as representatives from the industry and student representatives may meet and discuss current issues and demands.

Learning Outcomes:
A *Bologna Process* Training Conference

5. Objectives of Activity

The main objectives of the Bologna Process Training Conference were:

- To target the further development of learning outcomes, whilst taking into consideration the different approaches towards writing learning outcomes; and

- To identify which approaches are best suited for the design of learning outcomes that meet a student centred learning approach.

5.1 Target Group/Stakeholders

The target audience for the conference included representatives from the University of Nicosia in Cyprus, EUARSHE, the University of Madrid and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport in Croatia, as well as all national stakeholders in the education sector, particularly professionals involved in Higher Education.

Participants included student representatives from the University of Malta and MCAST, lecturers from the Institute of Tourism Studies, University of Malta and MCAST, doctoral students, retired educators, representatives from the National Commission for Higher Education, the National Team of Bologna Experts, representatives from the European Union Programmes Agency, Education International, the European Students' Union, representatives from the Foundation of Educational Services, Education Officers, the Malta Qualifications Council, Heads and Assistant Heads of Schools, professionals from primary health care and private providers.
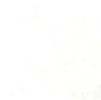
6. Welcome and Introduction

6.1 Opening Address – Hon. Dolores Cristina, Minister of Education, Employment and the Family

The Minister of Education, Employment and the Family (MEEF) welcomed the participants to the last seminar as part of the *Bologna Process* activities for the 2009-2011 cycle. The Minister explained that since the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, there were many initiatives put forward, obstacles faced and objectives reached. 47 participating countries have been setting action lines throughout the past years to consolidate the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In 2010, the European Higher Education Area was launched in a joint conference in Budapest and Vienna and the *Bologna Process* initiated another decade of hard work and change towards achieving a harmonised system in which students from different European Universities can benefit from mobility initiatives that their academic and cultural background.

Parallel to the *Bologna* Process, the *Copenhagen Process* is also transforming European Higher and Vocational Education Systems in remarkable ways while creating a new social dimension. At the same time the two processes will undoubtedly address the existing gap between professional and vocational education, social cohesion and inject a greater sense of unity and progression in the National Qualifications Frameworks. Malta has been an active participant in the Bologna Process. The 2009-2011 cycle was particularly eventful. Seven seminars including this last one have been held during this cycle focusing on the key indicators of the European Higher Education Area that is: quality assurance; training for Bologna Experts; employability; student-centred learning; education, research and innovation; international openness and the external dimension and finally; learning outcomes. These activities have generated in Malta a renewed interest in the *Bologna* Process among many academics and stakeholders including employers and employees and are a remarkable achievement for a small country with limited human and financial resources.

This accomplishment is the result of cooperation between three public agencies within the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family (MEEF) led by the National Team of *Bologna* Experts Malta. The European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA), the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) and the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE), have coordinated all activities and managed to achieve excellent results that enhance the *Bologna* Process in Malta.

During the past years, Malta has been witnessing a significant overall expansion in the Higher Education sector. This also meant an increase in both incoming and outgoing student mobility. In a knowledge-based economy, it is necessary to have a strong base of graduate and post-graduate programmes relevant to Malta's socio-economic development. In this regard, the Maltese government expressed its vision of making Malta a centre of excellence in seven areas of economic and social activity by 2015. These areas include ICT, Health, Tourism, High Value Added Manufacturing, Financial Services, the transformation of Gozo as an ecological island and last but not least the education sector itself as an international centre of excellence for learning and research.

Mobility, whether it is student or staff mobility, has been encouraged and promoted with the introduction of various exchange programmes and scholarships. MEEF has introduced a number of scholarships aimed specifically at increasing the participation rates in both under-graduate and post-graduate studies. These include: the Malta Government Scholarships Scheme (MGSS), the Strategic Educational Pathways Scholarship Scheme (STEPS) and the Malta Arts Scholarships. In 2010, the MGSS Undergraduate (MGSS-UG) scheme awarded 136 scholarships for students pursuing degrees in private or foreign Higher Education Institutions, whilst the MGSS Postgraduate

(MGSS-PG) scheme awarded 55 scholarships. The STEPS scheme awarded 221 scholarships, 74 of which were scholarships supporting science and technology related research. The Malta Arts Scholarships awarded 13 scholarships in 2010.

Mobility however needs to be supported by recognition. In 2002, the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC) was set up in order to facilitate the comparability of degrees. Since 2002, thousands of statements have been issued by the MQRIC, aside from the numerous consultations the centre provides to education institutions, warrant awarding bodies and policy making entities. In 2010 alone, more than 5,000 qualifications have been assessed for which recognition statements have been sent to various persons and organisations.

Moreover, Malta is also improving in various other initiatives to reach the *Bologna* Process targets. These include the introduction, by the University of Malta, of the Diploma Supplement (DS), the launch of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), the adoption by the UoM of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the implementation of Quality Assurance mechanisms. All of the above are tools which give students the opportunity to have even more compatible and comparable degrees and which enable them to get their qualifications recognised abroad more easily. This huge step forward would not have been possible without close collaboration between all stakeholders involved in Higher Education, vocational education as well as industry.

The link between education and industry is crucial in order to be competitive in this sector. Qualifications need to be industry-driven particularly in vocational training and based on nationally agreed occupational standards. Educational pathways are evermore based on a student-centred approach. Programmes offered need to be based on learning outcomes which in turn need to be drafted with the help of all stakeholders concerned. This is the way forward in order to provide a skilled workforce with the necessary knowledge and competences needed to enter and move within the labour market. There should be no failures in education and all students should have the possibility to move within the Educational ladder both horizontally and vertically. Any barriers between Higher Education and vocational education need to be brought down. Each individual has a story to tell and an experience to share and everyone has an invaluable skill or competence that is productive for the Maltese society.

The *Bologna Process* representing Higher Education, the *Copenhagen Process* representing Vocational education and the *Lisbon Process* representing Employment and Economic Growth are the three main processes that are shaping the youths' present and society's future. The processes offer an excellent opportunity to explore how all educational institutions can come together to give a rewarding educational experience to all citizens. Learning is a lifelong process and with the help of all Higher Education public and private providers, the feedback of all stakeholders involved in Higher Education, as well as the much needed input form the industry, there may be substantial improvement in the educational system. Deep appreciation is due to the National Team of *Bologna* Experts and to the Bologna Follow-up Group Coordinator for their efforts and commitment throughout the past years.

6.2 Introduction by Team of Bologna Experts Coordinator
Dr. James Calleja

This final conference shall be focusing on one of the last themes in the Bologna Declaration – Learning Outcomes. Most of the participants here today have dealt with this issue, and whilst there might be resistance to change, on the other hand there is the enthusiasm to look at learning outcomes as new opportunities for reform and innovation. These two lines of thought complement each other as change will take place but only where it is required and necessary. This is a voluntary process so there is no particular obligation to impose any changes. On

the other hand, some universities do insist that where possible, programmes should embody a learning outcomes approach.

When defining learning outcomes in programmes of studies, every learner matters. Learning outcomes based approaches depend on design, delivery and assessment. If the main aim is inclusivity, then it must be ensured that there are no failures. Learning outcomes depend on the way the programmes are designed and delivered so they cannot be seen separate from the design of the programmes, the assessment used and the delivery modes. There must also be focus upon curricula. Curricula are fundamental in improving human capital, motivating people to stay in education and training and promoting lifelong learning. In this context, we are moving away from learning objectives towards learning outcomes.

The focus is on learning that combines knowledge and skills with personal and socio-cultural competences. Knowledge is set in a context and is interdisciplinary whilst there must be focus on the labour market and employment needs. Most importantly, learning should be encouraged in a wide range of locations and by different methods. Furthermore, learning outcomes are statements of what an individual learner knows, understands and is able to do following the completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes should be defined as a set of knowledge, skills and competences; whilst these separate units may be considered as:

- Knowledge; an outcome of an assimilation of information;
- Skills; the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems; and
- Competences; the ability to use knowledge independently and with responsibility.

One must emphasize that learning outcomes do not replace learning inputs (content, teaching and learning methods, timetables) but in most cases, they may have a more or less prominent role that defines what the inputs are and their relative importance. On the other hand, the implementation of outcome oriented curricula entails training teachers, stimulating learning environments, linking the world of education and that of employment, willingness to be critical, innovative, committed and consistent. Learning outcome-based curricula can promote learner-centred inclusive teaching and learning practices. This depends upon the physical and psychological conditions, which are to be conducive to learning and which, lead to autonomous and active citizens who think critically.

7. Presentations and Informal Discussion

7.1 *Reflections on a Year of Seminars in Malta*

Mr. Daniel James Cassar, Deputy Head, Sir MA Refalo Centre for Further Studies

Mr. Daniel James Cassar commenced his presentation by giving an overview of the activities and conferences, which were carried out by the National Team of Bologna Experts throughout the past year. In this light, Mr. Cassar reflected upon the importance of teaching, pedagogy and training with the aim of designing and applying better learning outcomes. Teacher professionalism includes job related skills and more general skills whilst education is dependent upon its social and psychological aspects. Dominique Vespoorten held that:

> *Good pedagogy is commonly assumed to be related to individualized learning. This perspective sees learners as separate entities with unique learning goals and needs requiring customized support. In contrast to individualized learning, personalized learning emphasizes the notion that learners consider given settings personally relevant.*

Therefore, in promoting personalized learning, learning pathways must be created in order to cater for the non-traditional students. Moreover, it is essential for learners to be pro-active rather than reactive to the challenges that are faced within the Further and Higher Education sector. Flexibility in the teaching methodology is the key to success. Tacit knowledge, lifelong learning and flexible pathways are amongst the tools which must be provided to those wishing to learn and those who are currently engaged in full-time employment. The pedagogical debate is continuously addressing the need for an increasing collaboration between examining bodies and institutions and the concept of 'doing less with more'.

A learning outcomes approach is also crucial for better employability. Education at pre-tertiary level is meant to be geared towards replenishing the market with expertise when and where required. When dealing with employability, a specific focus should be placed upon the aim of adopting learning outcomes that 'arm' students with skills and competences that help society deal with unpredictability. Teachers are required to educate students for unpredictable circumstances through knowledge, skills and competences in the background of the volatility of current markets and their socioeconomic fabric. Therefore, matching programmes and courses to market trends and needs through learning outcomes is of utmost importance. From another perspective, policy enablers should consider employability when devising schemes such as ECO-Gozo. Undoubtedly, the preparation of students should include both work and life skills, which would enable the students to promote themselves within an ever-changing working environment. Students may be supported through counselling services and career guidance. In re-thinking and re-educating through a learning outcomes approach, educators must seriously consider the following factors:

- Lifelong Learning;
- Employability;
- Research and development;
- Social dimension;
- Stakeholders; and
- Students, as the constant focus of attention, i.e. student-centred learning.

One must also address students with learning disabilities and special needs. Learning outcomes for such students could optimally be structured in direct collaboration with the participating students so that their input would be directly considered within the process of designing learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are repeatedly interlinked with the notion of student-centred learning, which entails a greater element of trust in students in Further and Higher Education. In fact, discipline and trust are conducive to best practice which in turn leads to standardization. Learning outcomes can be attained through good practice. Learning outcomes are the only true measure of quality in Further and Higher Education, as enabling is more important than instructing. Learning outcomes are actually about what a student is expected to know and his/her ability to demonstrate the acquisition of the necessary know-how at the end of a particular course programme. There is actual evidence of knowledge, of the capability to show that the knowledge, skills and competences pertinent to that particular area have been attained and have been mastered. Additionally, attention must be dedicated to the development of the students' cognitive abilities as not all students are endowed with the same natural cognitive abilities. A learning outcomes approach is all about innovation, creativity and accountability, which are the core elements of a healthy educational ethos.

Finally, Mr. Cassar reiterated that the learning process is encapsulated within the socio-politico sphere and so, the realities and limitations of Malta's educational setup cannot be ignored. Each country and more specifically, each education system will write and define its educational policies, frameworks and learning outcomes in its own terms and thus reflecting, culture, tradition and social fabric despite the ultimate aim of standardization at a European level. Malta's educational system can only improve if there persists a continuous importance of re-thinking, re-writing and re-forming where and when required. The good practices of the past must also be safeguarded whilst embarking on new and dynamic strategies that lead to educational excellence.

7.2   *Re-Engineering Academic Programmes Using Learning Outcomes and ETCS*
Dr. Philippos Pouyioutas, Cyprus

Dr. Pouyioutas started his presentation by considering the elements which constitute learning outcomes. Subsequently, he argued that learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. Furthermore, learning outcomes statements are typically characterised by the use of active verbs expressing knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.[5] The writing of learning outcomes is a very specific task. The use of some verbs (create, plan, revise and analyze) are encouraged whilst others (know, become aware of and appreciate) are not to be used.

Hereunder is a set example of the objectives of a course programme in the Database area. The objectives include:

- Make students aware of the various database models and database systems;
- Provide students with deep knowledge for developing database applications and fundamental knowledge for developing web-based database applications;
- Cover in detail all aspects of SQL language (standard language for accessing databases);
- Thoroughly discuss the object-oriented database model, standards and languages and compare this model with the relational model; and
- Introduce state of the art research in the area of databases.

After the completion of the course programme, students may be expected to be able to (examples):

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5   http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf

- Critically compare and evaluate database models and database systems;
- Design and develop database applications using commercially available database systems; and
- Enhance and fine-tune database applications regarding security, authorization and optimization.

Learning outcomes should be smart. Therefore, they must be specific (clear and unambiguous), measurable (objectively assessed), achievable (at the right level and possible to be achieved by students) realistic and time specific (to be achieved within the timeframe of the course programme). Learning outcomes have also been dealt with and referred to at various levels ranging from the Bologna Process, the European Qualifications Framework and the European Standards in Discipline and Subject Areas down to the institutional, course and task level. The usefulness of learning outcomes has also been a topic of heated debate amongst learners and academics. However, throughout the debates, the benefits of learning outcomes are being crystallized. First and foremost, learning outcomes provide a common platform for transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of programmes. Students become aware of what they will be able to do after the completion of their course programmes. On the other hand, the faculty is forced to rethink its curricula and ensure that each learning outcome is adequately assessed. Employers are also aware of what graduates have achieved and are able to do whilst at the same time, quality assurance agencies are facilitated when conducting audits of programmes and when evaluating European awards (through the EQF-NQF mapping).

Dr. Pouyioutas proceeded by considering re-engineering in terms of Business Information Systems. This would include the re-thinking of the business processes, the re-designing of such, the restructuring of the organization, automating the newly designed processes and creating a new type of organization, when necessary. This same model is applied in the case of re-engineering in terms of academic programmes. In this regard, this would include:

- Re-thinking of the academic programmes;
- Re-designing the academic programmes;
- Re-structuring the academic programmes; and
- Sometimes creating new academic programmes.

It is also apt to point out that the Bologna Process embraces and promotes student empowerment, student-centred learning, faculty members becoming educators and facilitators of the learning process, the active participation of the learner and the feedback and input of the industry and professional associations. ECTS is another crucial tool in increasing transparency and comparability. In fact, ECTS urge the faculty to re-think its programme structure, the content of the programme and the delivery methods so that they may be student oriented.

Dr. Pouyioutas utilized a case study of a two year project at the University of Nicosia in order to better illustrate the concept of re-engineering academic programmes using ECTS and learning outcomes in a concrete manner. The project commenced in October 2008 and was completed in June 2010. It was coordinated by the Vice Rector of the University of Nicosia and audited by the University's International Quality Assurance Auditor.

Some of the problems encountered during the implementation of this project were resistance to change, initial questioning on the usefulness of the project, difficulty in writing learning outcomes and differentiating between knowledge, skills and competences. Others faced confusion of learning outcomes at the programme and course levels, difficulty in monitoring the process for students filling the workload forms, paper work and manual processing and the use of IT packages instead of an integrated support IT tool. Undoubtedly, this was a learning process for the University and therefore, a number of observations and suggestions may be drawn from this process. The use of ECTS and learning outcomes should be highlighted whilst explaining the benefits of such for all stakeholders. The stakeholders must be convinced about the usefulness of this exercise and the process must

be planned and set within realistic deadlines. There needs to be an open communication channel and the provision of training alongside regular meetings, standard forms and templates and the utilization of IT packages to reduce manual work and avoid errors. Nonetheless, resistance, mistakes and problems are to be expected.

Dr. Pouyioutas concluded that the re-engineering of academic programmes using learning outcomes provides a great opportunity to improve the programme, the delivery and assessment methods and the students' learning process. Learning outcomes benefit all stakeholders and contribute to the mobility of students, graduates and faculty employees within Europe.

7.3 ECTS between Workload and Learning Outcomes
(How to allocate credits to different disciplines)

Mr. Radu Constantinescu, Romania

Mr. Constantinescu started off his presentation by posing a very challenging question to the participants when enquiring whether it is beneficial or not to have the Bologna Process. What does the Bologna Process suppose and promote? For students, the Bologna Process represents further flexibility in choosing various educational paths and the development of mobility. For educators, the Bologna Process provides help in planning and assessing the recognition of learning units or of learning programmes. The unity in the process of validation and recognition of qualifications is essential for the labour market whilst for learners at large, the Bologna Process brought about the development of the lifelong learning system and the recognition of prior learning.

The distinction between learning outcomes and competences must be identified. A competence may be a quality, ability and a capacity that belongs to an individual. It can be demanded by educators, students, employers or policy makers. On the other hand, a learning outcome is a general statement formulated by educators only in terms of measurable results, not referring to an individual. The learning outcome expresses the level to which a given competency has to be formed or enhanced in a given educational activity. The Tuning Project defines competences as 'dynamic combinations of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, demonstration of knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values'.[6] Competences can be either generic (common to any degree programme) or specific to a field of study.

Competences may also vary depending on the perspective of the stakeholder within Further and Higher Education. The figure below illustrates the different characteristics of competences as viewed from academics, graduates and employers.

In the process of designing a study programme, one must establish the competences, formulate the programme learning outcomes, formulate learning outcomes for each learning unit and evaluate the workload for each unit and allocate the credits. A learning outcome is normally written using an active verb form indicating the type of learning outcome. Additionally, learning outcomes should be specific, objective, achievable, useful and standard-setting (indicate the standard to be achieved).

7.4 Question Time and Discussion

Chaired by Dr. James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator

One of the participants enquired on how the workload required by the learning outcomes approach was managed at the University of Nicosia. In reply it was explained that all the course programmes leading to degrees at the University of Nicosia were to be structured within a pre-defined workload and hours of teaching.

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6   Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, 2000.

Another participant argued that there is currently a sense of confusion about the approach of learning outcomes and many of the criticism is aimed at the notion that competence cannot exist without knowledge. This has led to the confusion and misinterpretation of the usage of the terms 'knowledge', 'skills', 'attitudes' and 'competences'. The participant followed up this point by enquiring on how acceptable it would be to deviate from the standards identified in competences, skills and knowledge to add the notion of attitudes and how these gaps could be bridged? In reply it was explained that usually, when faculties are asked to write learning outcomes, they tend to reply in terms of competences, however they themselves ask for a distinction between the three terms. During the discussion the students' expectations after they finish a course were also brought up. Knowledge is the context of EQF and is specified as factual. On the other hand, what is the definition of a course, programme and module? In fact, there is confusion amongst states regarding what really constitutes the three blocks of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competences'.

In reply it was stated that some member states such as Portugal refuse to use the term 'competence' and use the word 'attitude' instead. This should not have an impact as long as they are moving towards the direction of identifying what a student may be able to do at the end of the earning experience. Of course, countries are different in their approach to learning however, it is important that these differences are understood and used in a common structure and roadmap. One should also note that it is a landmark achievement for Europe to instil common standards, throughout its universities, in such a short period of time.

Another participant asked whether there should be further focus on the result indicators rather than on performance indicators. In reply it was stated that both should be seriously considered because to perform something, there must be very clear output and tentative outcomes. It is true that somehow the formulation of the learning outcomes is somewhat more concerned with the end result. However, there should be ample flexibility and focus upon the full educational journey. Furthermore, it was explained that in Cyprus, student feedback is also included within the design of the curriculum. Afterwards, student feedback and evaluation are once again taken into consideration throughout the semesters.

7.5 *The Link between Learning Outcomes and Qualification Standards – Learning Outcomes as Transparency Tools*
Mr. Stefan Delplace, EURASHE

Mr. Delplace provided a brief overview of EURASHE as a European association for professional Higher Education institutions. The members of EURASHE are: National Associations of University Colleges; individual Higher Education Institutions; professional associations and; stakeholder organizations.[7] Amongst the main features of professional Higher Education, there subsists a strong link with the world of employment and with enterprises which are in close collaboration with the stakeholders. Innovation is considered as a driving force for knowledge creation whilst the courses are practice-oriented and competence-based. Flexible schemes and study programmes for new groups of learners are created in full access of the labour market.

The use of learning outcomes within professional Higher Education was referred to in the Budapest Convention of 2010[8] as part of the ten commitments for the European Higher Education Area in 2020. The Convention states that:

> **Budapest Convention, 2010**
>
> *NQFs must be elaborated with a strong emphasis on learning outcomes, ... allowing a variety of learning paths to a given qualification, including informal and non-formal learning.*

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7   For further information about EURASHE, please visit http://www.eurashe.eu

8   Bologna Ministerial Conference, Budapest, 11th March 2010.

Quality assurance principles complement the focus on learning outcomes. Quality assurance is primarily the responsibility of education and training providers as an integral part of their management and respect for diversity. This should entail the involvement of all stakeholders, both internal and external. Internal and external quality assurance should be cyclical, systematic, structured and prolonged with enhancement measures based on conclusions. Quality assurance systems include clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, coherent evaluation methods linking self-assessment to external reviews, feedback mechanisms and appropriate resources.

In light of the above, quality assurance guarantees that the intended learning outcomes, through the right processes become achieved learning outcomes. This also serves as a transparency tool for the benefit of the learner, the (prospective) employer and the institution. As a matter of fact, this is also referred to in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance whereby Article 1.2 makes direct reference to the development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes. When vertically used, learning outcomes link short cycle degrees to the Bachelor level and are intended as a continuation from a Bachelor to a Masters level. When horizontally used, learning outcomes specify the position of programmes in a particular field. Through learning outcomes, every programme is unique but comparable.

From a national perspective, learning outcomes can be used to enhance the profile of a Further and Higher Education Institution. This is due to the fact that learning outcomes have a direct link with the mission of the institution, which in professional Higher Education focuses on applied research, has a regional orientation and emphasizes vocational skills. Learning outcomes can also be used for designing the learning process, teaching and learning forms, for making study programmes and for assessment methods. The link with student-centred learning is also evident as learning outcomes define generic competences and learning in different settings, including autonomous learning processes. Professionally oriented programmes require the involvement of external stakeholders especially in view of the current impact of globalization, of the labour market and the growth of student impact. The employable qualified graduate is indeed the reference for structuring a programme based on a learning outcomes approach. The flagship actions of Education and Training 2020 list the aims of:

- Reducing school drop out to 20%;
- 40% of age group to attain Higher Education; and
- 15% of adults to participate in lifelong learning

What is the next step for learning outcomes? The ultimate aim of learning outcomes is to enhance student and professional mobility and support easier pathways to lifelong learning. Therefore, the use of learning outcomes in flexible pathways such as practice-based work, student placements and professional and sectoral profiles should be strongly considered. In the context of lifelong learning, learning outcomes start from a student-centred process of learning, where the student acquires competences, while following one's own learning path. This requires a

teacher or rather a coach, who monitors a quality assured process of learning. Programmes are building stones, based on learning outcomes and modules, which take into account the personal and professional development of the learner.

The benefits of flexible systems of learning have not been disputed. Institutions and providers can offer tailored courses that are affordable for the learner. Short courses also allow for greater flexibility for specific learners, in response to the labour market demands whilst course programmes become less rigid and allow for flexible learning paths.

7.6 *Identifying, Developing and Assessing Learning Outcomes*
Dr. Carmen Vizcarro, Spain

Dr. Vizcarro explained that ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. In turn, learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after the successful completion of a process of learning.[9] From an educational point of view, competences are at the core of the Bologna Process as they underlie credit allocation, award accumulation, transfer and recognition, mobility, educational planning and quality assurance and enhancement. The ECTS Users' Guide draws a distinction between competences and learning outcomes. From an educational perspective, the way competences are perceived determines how they are described, developed and assessed. Strangely, very few discussions have been held on the conceptions of competences in Higher Education.

The challenges of Higher Education are many. The primary goal of Higher Education is to prepare students for an unknown future, taking into account the rhythm of advances and developments within all aspects of society. Henceforth, students must be prepared to learn in new environments and solve problems under uncertainty, to learn under these same conditions and develop strong autonomous professional quality criteria and to open tasks with varying uncertainty levels, diverse learning settings with high quality demands and tools to develop them.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council has described competences in Higher Education as the combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin effective and/or superior performance in a professional/occupational area.[10] In the liberal professions, this has been translated in the capacity to act and solve problems of various kinds that can be approached from a given disciplinary field using its knowledge base, methods, values and ethics. Competences should be meaningful, easily understood, limited in number, attractive, realistic, progressive, coherent, expressed at threshold level and assessable. In her brief critique of Blooms Taxonomy, Dr. Vizcarro argued that a distinction of cognitive, effective and psychomotor competences is too atomistic as they should not be combined in a complex competence. Competences should be described with verbs, predicates and context with definitions of conditions. Analytic approaches can be useful when developing competences and establishing assessment criteria as they draw attention to relevant facets of performance.

In developing competences, the latter must be shown and properly explained. Students should be involved as they are faced with the natural and surrogate situation requiring the competence. Support should be provided for performance, alongside feedback and the discussion of good and bad practices. Opportunities should be provided for reflection and for competence practice, if possible under changing conditions to grasp the unchanging facets of a competence and its pertinence limits. A professional competence includes:

- Acting in effective and appropriate ways adapted to changing circumstances;
- Explaining what the professional is trying to do and why;
- Interacting and working effectively with others;
- Keep learning alongside personal and professional development; and
- Providing varied and flexible responses.

The role of assessment methods in this area is central. Assessment is a powerful learning tool as it is the way in which we define what students must learn. Methods of assessment may vary and entail continuous assessment, performance assessment and criterion referenced assessment. Performance assessment may focus on constructed responses and products whilst often requiring qualitative judgment with the need to assure objectivity and in depth information. Dr. Vizcarro provided an example of assessment criteria utilized for a level 1 learning outcome.

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9   ECTS User Guide, Education and Culture DG, 2009.

10   Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, ANMC, 2005.

- <u>LO:</u> Level 1: ...will be able to explain and demonstrate the main features of effective academic essay at Level 1.

- <u>Assessment criteria:</u> The essay will be word-processed, between 1500 and 2000 words on a given topic. The essay will relate to its title, will be clearly written and structured, will demonstrate the contribution of further reading and thinking. The student will be able to explain how the essay demonstrates these features and how they contribute to its overall effectiveness.

The assessment system consists of an assessment goal, a task, a scoring guide and exemplars. Miller's pyramid for competence assessment (1990) shows a hierarchy of assessment procedures.

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

DO — IN VIVO PERFORMANCE

SHOW HOW — SIMULATED PERFORMANCE

KNOW HOW — MC TESTS, ESSAYS, ORALS

KNOW WHAT: KNOWLEDGE
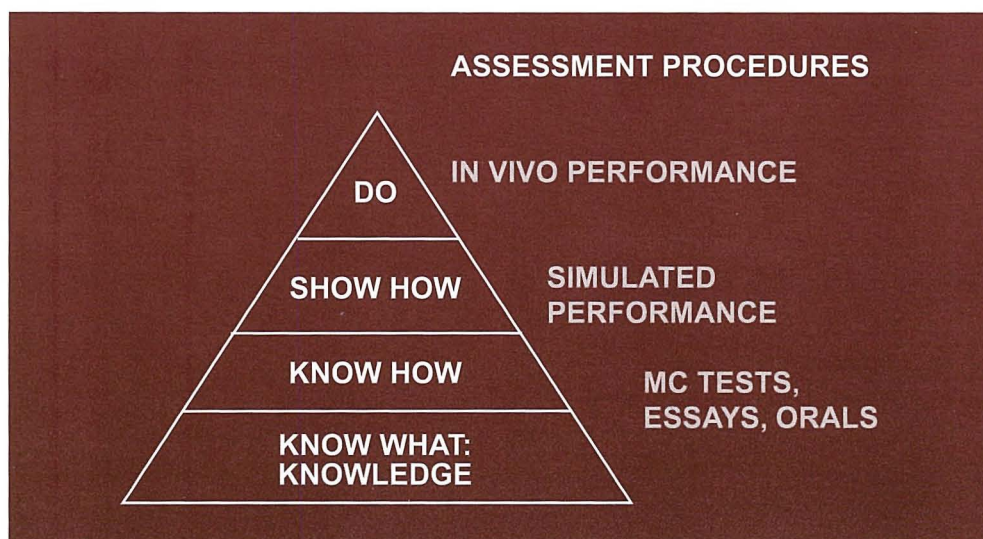
Grading criteria (rubrics) describe the relative quality of the performance and allow for differentiations between the performances of individual students.

Educational coherence is based upon the relationship between goals, the learning process and methods of assessment. Therefore, educational planning is required in order to create meaningful learning outcomes and processes. A change in focus is also necessary in order to establish a move from teaching to learning. Educators must strive to make the whole process transparent and work towards an education for life. One must also be aware of the liabilities, which are brought forward throughout the implementation of these processes. Some of the risks include simplification and the devaluation of education, costs and technical reliability and construct representation. It must be understood that the success of facing the challenges posed by Further and Higher Education relies upon the willingness and readiness of students and faculty to embrace competence based education and the conceptual change it brings about.

7.7   Question Time and Discussion

Chaired by Dr. James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator

A participant started the discussion by commenting that a link should be established between learning outcomes and quality assurance because when a tutor is asked to identify the learning outcomes, the intending outcomes are made public so that students may check whether the outcomes have been achieved. This leads to quality assurance because what is delivered throughout the course is no longer private and thus, increases accountability and transparency. On the other hand, the difficulty with different universities arises in the exercise of comparing the institutions. In this light, the participant asked whether Universities are scared of being ranked in lower positions as less better Universities. In reply it was stated that it is not only within this area that the element of competition is feared. This is a general feeling that will require time since this is a process which in different countries is at different stages. This is one part of the quality assurance enhancement process and it is up to the institutions to handle this matter carefully due to its delicate nature.

7.8   *Building the Learning Outcomes Culture in a Higher Education Institution*

Mr. Luka Juros, Croatia

Mr. Juros started his presentation by stating that the underlying assumption of the paradigm of turning to learning outcomes is a comprehensive one, as it affects Further and Higher Education as a whole as well as every individual educator. However, it is not unique in being comprehensive but it is unique in a behavioural aspect. This paradigm shift affects the way teachers do things and affects teaching as such. Grant funding also affects research planning and design whilst quality assurance introduces new procedures and tasks.

In discussing learning outcomes and determining the way forward, one must analyze the content and contributions received by students in this regard. This leads to more purposeful teaching and learning design and a reflection of what graduates know, understand and are able to do with their degrees. The element of culture is also apparent however the concept must be broken down by assessing behaviour, interpretation, evaluation, feeling and membership. However, where do alternative narratives stand? What is the fluctuation of culture and how many cultures are present? There are six types of cultures namely collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual and tangible. The change needed for a culture of learning outcomes is required at both individual and institutional levels. Learning outcomes and student centred learning entails:

- A paradigm shift in thinking;
- Engagement of students;
- Wider stakeholder involvement;
- Student workload oriented;
- Professional development of staff;
- IT support and e-learning; and
- Institutional roles and procedures, including quality assurance.

In creating cultural change, one must identify culture and the institutional design which is set as the final goal. To be able to enact change, one must clearly define why the discussion about learning outcomes is taking place in the first place. Some unlearning is also required. This includes the disconfirmation of current assumptions. New specific behavioural goals must be formulated with time and support the transformation. The new way will only succeed if it is actually better than the old way.[11] These new cultural changes should be further facilitated by changed strategies, which must comprise of senior: administrative support; collaborative leadership; robust design and visible actions and; staff development. Cultural change must reflect current teaching design along with

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11 Schein, 2004.

other issues and must produce synergy with wider institutional contexts. Visions, goals and objectives must be designed within flexible parameters in accordance with culture and available resources. Professional development, reflection, iteration and the promotion of success must be ensured. The culture of learning outcomes is a re-conceptualization and consolidation of what is currently being carried out.

7.9   Question Time and Discussion

Chaired by Dr. James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator

One of the speakers held that throughout the presentation delivered by Dr. Carmen Vizcarro, there was an evident link between competence and assessment. This nexus facilitates the process for the learner to design the modules and for the students to understand the criteria that they will be assessed upon. The relationship between competences and assessment is crucial as assessment is required for the provision of a credit award. It gives coherence and achieves a holistic approach. Assessment is much more related to outcomes rather than to competence. The notion of competence being defined in a wider fashion nevertheless, adds an element which is valuable from the point of view of the professional and the student. Even in assessment, the learner will rely on learning outcomes.

Another speaker argued that when knowledge is added to competences and skills, learning outcomes are produced, however conceptually the learning outcomes approach continues to be confused with the objectives of the course programme.

It was furthermore clarified that the initial reactions of staff to this change consisted of exchanges of communication stating that this was not an easy process to engage in. It was thus, a learning process for the institutions themselves.

It was furthermore indicated by another speaker, that in Croatia, learning outcomes were viewed as another burdensome exercise arising out of the Bologna Process. Nonetheless, the heads of the major institutions have now recognized the importance of learning outcomes. Finally, another speaker held that the University of Madrid was at first, resistant to change. Subsequently, institutional funds were allocated for small projects where groups of students and teachers started carrying out and implementing such changes through various projects. This was the core of real change as the projects gave way for the need for training.

8. Concluding Remarks

Dr. James Calleja thanked the international guests and speakers and other participants for their contributions and insisted that although this was the last seminar held by the National Team of Bologna Experts for the 2009-2011 term, it is essential to translate all the discussions during our sessions into concrete and practical actions and put theory into practice.

8.1 Outcomes of the meeting

This conference on Learning Outcomes proved to be an opportunity for discussion for teachers, academics and students who are already familiar and exposed to the design and writing of learning outcomes. During the seminar however further clarification as to the language and terms utilized in such an exercise, the administrative and academic management of the learning outcomes system and its linkage with other fundamental principles of student-centred learning and quality assurance arising out of the Bologna Process were also given.

The re-engineering of academic programmes using learning outcomes and ECTS was considered in detail with factual examples of good practice used by international Universities. Furthermore, learning outcomes were also thoroughly discussed in parallel with other concepts and established notions such as the use of ECTS and their allocation of workload, qualification standards and comparability and quality assurance in the light of student-centred learning. Learning Outcomes were also deemed as useful tools to increase transparency and more clear deliverables, which are expected by students at the end of their course programme. Assessment methods were also discussed as ways through which students may assess their progress and qualify for the provision of a qualification award.

The seminar also delved into the technical approaches needed to transform 'outcomes' in programmes of Higher Education into 'learning-outcomes'. The scope was to ensure that in identifying what a learner 'should know' and 'be able to do' at the end of a learning experience, a methodological approach that best fits the professional capacity needed to perform in a career is chosen. Finally, the proposed recommendations and past developments were considered within the backdrop of a cultural vision for Further and Higher Education and the cultural diversity of the different Member States across Europe.

8.2 Recommendations

The participants of the 'Learning Outcomes: A Bologna Process Training Conference' bring forward the following recommendations:

- The clear and concrete training of faculty staff in the design and formulation of learning outcomes;

- The inclusion of student feedback throughout the course programme and not simply upon its commencement;

- The promotion of learning outcomes as a tool towards the achievement of student-centred learning and quality assurance;

- The continuous importance of re-thinking, re-writing and re-forming where and when required;

- The adoption of flexibility especially, within lifelong learning paths;

- The need for learning outcomes to be specific, objective, achievable, useful and standard setting;

- The use of learning outcomes in flexible pathways such as practice-based work, student placements and professional and sectoral profiles;

- The identification of culture and the institutional design which is set as the final goal in creating culture change; and

- The facilitation of culture change by different strategies, senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design, visible actions and staff development.

List of Seminars:

2009-2011 Bologna cycle:

- *Quality Assurance: A National Bologna Process Seminar, 19 November 2010.*

- **The Bologna Process: A National Bologna Expert Training Session, 14 December 2010.**

- *Employability: A National Bologna Process Seminar, 20 January 2011.*

- *Student-Centred Learning: A Bologna Process International Conference, 16-17 February 2011.*

- *Education, Research and Innovation: A National Bologna Process Seminar, 10 March 2011.*

- *International Openness and the External Dimension: A Bologna Process International Seminar, 18-19 April 2011.*

- **Learning Outcomes: A Bologna Process Training Conference, 20 May 2011.**

List of Publications

2009-2011 Bologna cycle:

- *The Impact of the Bologna Process on Higher Education Institutions in Malta - An overview of the targets achieved and future challenges.*

- *Quality Assurance, Employability and Education, Research & Innovation - A Report.*

- **Bologna Expert Training Session & Learning Outcomes Seminar - A Report.**

- *Student-Centred Learning A Bologna Process International Conference - A Report.*

- *International Openness and the External Dimension Seminar - A Report.*

- *Bologna Expert Training Session, Student-Centred Learning, International Openness & the External Dimension and Learning Outcomes - Information Booklet.*

- *Bologna Process Malta - At a Glance.*

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EUPA	European Union Programmes Agency
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
KSU	Kunsill tal-iStudenti Universitarji (University Students' Council)
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MEEF	Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family
MGSS	Malta Government Scholarship Scheme
MQC	Malta Qualifications Council
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MQRIC	Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre
NCHE	National Commission for Higher Education
NTBE	National Team of Bologna Experts
SQL	Standard Query Language
STEPS	Strategic Educational Pathways Scholarship scheme
UoM	University of Malta
VET	Vocational Education and Training