



EUROPEAN  
Higher Education Area



**BOLOGNA  
PROCESS**  
MALTA



Bologna Process Malta Seminars

# QUALITY ASSURANCE, EMPLOYABILITY AND EDUCATION, RESEARCH & INNOVATION



A Report

NATIONAL TEAM OF BOLOGNA EXPERTS MALTA 2009-2011

***Bologna Process  
Seminars Malta***

***Quality Assurance, Employability and  
Education, Research & Innovation***



**A Report**

**National Team of Bologna Experts (2009-2011)**

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*All presentations referred to in this document, and further information regarding the seminars held in Malta can be found on:  
[www.llp.eupa.org.mt](http://www.llp.eupa.org.mt)*

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## Preface

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



This document is 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, the Referencing Report was published by the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC). The report aims at referencing 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' is still being 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 and Mr. Carl Grech for the write up of this report which serves as a follow-up of the seminars entitled: 'Quality Assurance: A National Bologna Process Seminar', 'Employability: A National Bologna Process Seminar' and 'Education, Research and Innovation: A National Bologna Process Seminar'.

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# Quality Assurance: A National Bologna Process Seminar

## 1. Objectives of Activity

Quality Assurance has increasingly been given more importance and more exposure within the Bologna Process. Quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms were first mentioned in the 1999 Bologna Communiqué. Over the years, further collaboration between European countries allowed for the adoption of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the development of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

The aim of this seminar was to evaluate the implementation of the quality assurance procedures in Higher Education at institutional, national and European level. Moreover this activity served as a platform for stakeholders, involved in Higher Education in Malta, to gain feedback from foreign and local experts on issues related to quality assurance.

### 1.1 Target group/Stakeholders

The target audience for the seminar was all stakeholders in the education sector, particularly professionals involved in Higher Education.

## 2. Presentations and Informal Discussion

### 2.1 The Key Objectives of the Seminar – Dr James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator

Dr. Calleja enlisted the three main objectives of the seminar, which were:

1. To discuss the use of Learning Outcomes as a means of making learning more attractive and transparent;
2. To underline the importance of a 'learning outcomes' approach as a student-centred approach. It was here explained that learning outcomes could be used as a means to facilitate the liaison that goes on between the student and the person who facilitates the learning;
3. To provide guidelines on how to write learning outcomes to add value, quality and transferability to other learning experiences; this refers to the use of properly written learning outcomes to connect different areas of learning.

Dr. Calleja went on to define the learning outcomes as stated in the ECTS users' guide:

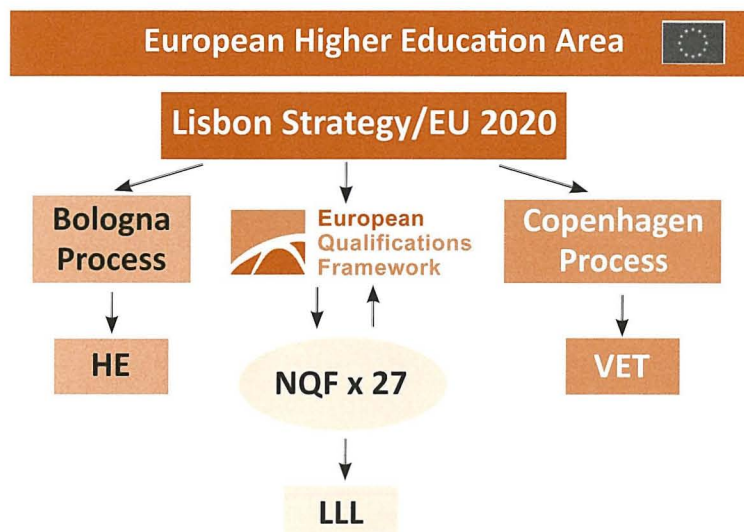
*"What a person is to know, understand and be able to demonstrate at the end of a learning period."*

Further to this, Dr. Calleja explained both the different strata, from level one through to level 8 of the Maltese National Qualification Framework and how each of these levels has been designed in order to accommodate a system built around learning outcomes.

 **Malta Qualifications Framework**  
based on learning outcomes 

|   |  |   |      |
|---|--|---|------|
| 8 | DOCTORAL DEGREE  |   | 8    |
| 7 | MASTER'S DEGREE<br>POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA<br>POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE                |   | 7    |
| 6 | BACHELOR'S DEGREE  |   | 6    |
| 5 | UNDERGRADUATE DIPLOMA<br>UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE<br>HIGHER EDUCATION CERTIFICATE | FOUNDATION DEGREE<br>VET HIGHER DIPLOMA | 5    |
| 4 | MATRICULATION LEVEL<br>ADVANCED LEVEL<br>INTERMEDIATE LEVEL                        | VET DIPLOMA                             | 4(d) |
| 3 | GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 3<br>SEC grade 1-5   | VET LEVEL 3                             | 3(c) |
| 2 | GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 2<br>SEC grade 6-7   | VET LEVEL 2                             | 2(b) |
| 1 | GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 1<br>SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE                            | VET LEVEL 1                             | 1(a) |

An explanation of the European Higher Education Area was given wherein the objectives set by the Lisbon agenda and EU2020 were briefly set out. Furthermore, it was explained that the Bologna Process and Copenhagen Process are parallel and complementary in their nature. Whereas the latter deals with Vocational Education and Training, the former deals with Higher Education. The role of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was also elucidated along with that of the National Qualifications Frameworks of the 27 Member States. In addition to this, it was further stated that the final aim here is also to push towards increased Lifelong Learning.



Dr. Calleja went on to explain that the aim is to ensure comparability of quality in both local and international programmes as a rudimentary principle of the EHEA. In order for this to be achievable, a different and clearer way of writing learning outcomes was necessary particularly in the interests of transparency.

Moreover, proper acquisition of stated learning outcomes should also result in the transferability of skills and competences, both horizontally as well as vertically. Ultimately, the aim would be to allow the learners to move within the academic process, progressively, whilst limiting retention.



It was stated that these approaches will necessarily pose a number of challenges to institutions, however it was specified that the content need not be changed; but it was only the design of qualifications that required re-thinking. Moreover, the knowledge, skills and competences which the learner is expected to have at the end of the course are required to achieve an effective writing of learning outcomes.

In addition, it is crucial that the methods and mode of assessing a study unit, which is delivered according to the set learning outcomes, should be paced according to the acquisition of the specific learning outcomes.

It is apt to note that the design and delivery of appropriate learning outcomes poses challenges to both the institutions, those facilitating the learning, and the students themselves. A pedagogical shift is required in order to properly implement these measures.

The challenges that are posed by the proper writing of learning outcomes were also elucidated. Dr. Calleja then reminded participants that the challenges posed by these changes were opportunities to re-think, re-form and re-write curricula based on a student-centred approach.

## **2.2 A learning outcomes approach to Higher Education Programmes**

### **Dr. Anthony John Vickers, Bologna Expert**

Dr. Vickers commenced his presentation by stating that transparency will result in employability as qualifications are global. It was explained that making the learning outcomes more transparent, clear and simple to understand will benefit the learners, since these tools shall consequently increase their employability.



The speaker went on to refer to various sections of the ECTS Users' Guide, of which sections constantly mention the use of learning outcomes. This shows the importance of learning outcomes to ECTS and the learning process.

A description of the Diploma Supplement (DS) was given. It explained that the latter was mentioned in a number of Bologna Process Communiqués. The speaker also gave information on what the content of the DS should be. The DS is meant to provide a description of the nature, level, content and context of the studies pursued by the holder of that diploma supplement.

The aims of the DS are various; however it primarily facilitates transparency in Higher Education and assists the academic and professional recognition of qualifications. Transparency is increased through the adoption of a form in which the content is presented, thereby making it internationally translatable and understandable. This end result would also be desirable since it would aid mobility, participation in further and Higher Education and also lifelong learning.

Dr. Vickers then went on to explain in some further detail what learning outcomes are by saying that these are what the learner is expected to know and understand after a period of studying. This can be achieved through assessment. The workload of learning outcomes was also mentioned since generally study programmes carry a certain weight in work that has to be carried out. The Blooms Taxonomy was also used in the formulation of these descriptors. The importance of receiving and reviewing feedback was also mentioned to be in the interest of quality.

A sample description of the process in the UK was given. In the university mentioned in the example, each faculty issues learning outcomes based on the requirements of the warrant for that qualification – this allows the programmes to have the professional status requirement

The use of modular structures was also mentioned. In the example mentioned all modules are either 7.5 or 15 ECTS, allowing the modules to be fully rounded.

The Edinburgh Napier University was given as a best practice example. A publicly available modular catalogue needs to be made available, whilst care must be made to create a distinction between the requirements of public information and copyright issues. In the formulation of the programme, care should be taken so that this caters for the whole range of competences that the student needs to acquire.

Dr. Vickers went on to elicit what Learning Outcomes are not:

1. Purely for administrative purposes – they allow the stakeholders to experience the level of quality assurance of those programmes.
2. Developed with no assessment in mind
3. Written without a careful choice of Verbs

As a concluding remark, Dr. Vickers reminded the audience that transparency translates into employability whilst qualifications are indeed global.

### **2.3 Question Time and Discussion – Chaired by Dr. James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator**

One of the participants inquired on whether audits of Learning Outcomes were being carried out in the UK by Educational Institutions. In reply it was stated that the latter depends on the subject area. Mention was also made of student feedback and the setting up of staff - student liaison committees/module level questionnaires/ and a national student survey.

In the case of the UK, it was explained that the results of the national student survey are available to the students themselves. It was noted that whilst students may not be prepared enough to give the technical feedback, they can provide details as to how they feel about the particular module that is being audited or assessed.

Regarding the internationalisation of curricula, reference was made to the qualification credit framework. In the UK there is not a typical framework for credits. Issues of the number of credits allocated are also very debatable. 7.5 ECTS may be the minimum credit weight, having 3 to 5 learning outcomes. This allows for proper recognition of the workload for students. If the size of the unit, it is hard to scale it down properly as the workload to unit weighting is not a linear function.

On the other hand, if the weighting given is too big, students can have serious repercussions on progression if they fail that particular study unit. So the preferred weighting is either 7.5 or 15. Project modules and year modules usually carry 15 credits each.

On the vocational side, ECTS may not be able to recognize acceleration or deceleration of the participation in the programme of study. This is the main reason for the development of a parallel system of accreditation, other than ECTS.

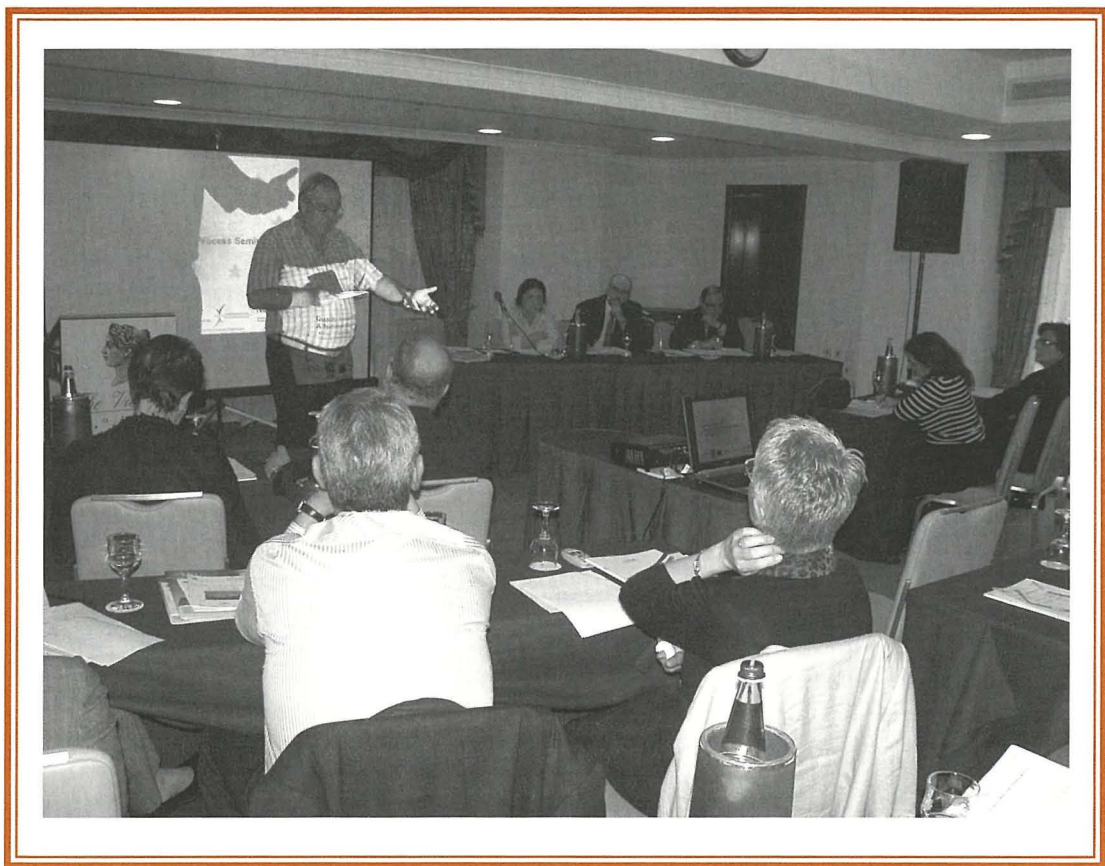
The formulation of learning outcomes was a debated topic during the discussion. The main problem with learning outcomes has repeatedly been identified to be the incomprehensible formulation of the descriptions of the expectations – the use of ‘the student will be exposed to’ or ‘reasonable numerical skills’ do not allow for the proper definition of what is to be expected. These should be written in a way that shows that the student will be able to do something. In addition to this, it was stated that teaching objectives are to be distinguished from the learning outcomes.

A good understanding on the cognitive process is required – and modules should be built around this. As one progresses up the levels, the questions should shift from “define” and “quote” to “evaluate” and “assess”. Nowadays, the main issue is to help students to develop their cognitive ability as students nowadays, may not have this natural cognitive ability.

The definition of a learning outcome is proved when there is evidence of a learning outcome. Students need to demonstrate and be able to show the competences acquired. There needs to be assessment.

Another participant asked whether the writing of a learning outcome was seen as something progressing from a bag of knowledge, to a set of skills, or to a demonstration of a set of skills.

In reply it was stated that knowledge is just one part of the topic. If there is some sort of model, there is a concept which is written beyond the aims. There are also cultural issues, due to the translation in the creation of learning outcomes within different cultural contexts. There needs to be a top level approach and review of how academics are constructing the learning outcomes. The benchmark status is quite easy to do and to assess. Moreover the learning outcomes should have value in terms of internationalizing those students. Essentially, the end result should be that the learning outcomes should be internationally comparable. Furthermore it was explained that the grading criteria should also be given in the description of the assessment method to allow for greater transparency.



## 3. Workshop

### 3.1 Group A: Discussion, led by Ms. Jo-Ann Attard, APQRU, University of Malta

The discussion centred round the importance of shifting from the traditional “teacher-centred” approach to a “student-centred” approach which revolves around what students are able to do after they obtain their qualification.

It was noted that use of learning outcomes makes learning more meaningful and effective. Besides making it easier for faculty to see how modules link together to form coherent programmes, this approach makes the objectives of learning programmes clearer and more easily understood by students, employers and other stakeholders.

In order to establish which learning outcomes are achieved they should be written in a manner which makes them capable of being assessed/measured. Some of the benefits of using learning outcomes were highlighted:

#### *Programme and Module/Unit Design*

Learning outcomes allow for the proper determination of the key purposes of the programme and how the components of that programme can be fit together, without overlap, whilst ensuring consistency of delivery and availability of the necessary resources.

#### *Teachers*

Teachers can benefit from proper use of learning outcomes by more effective design or structure of the content to be delivered. This allows for the pre-determination of appropriate teaching methodologies and help with the creation of appropriate assessment criteria.

#### *Students*

Clear learning outcomes should increase the students’ own awareness of their learning process, allowing them to make informed choices of modules in their programmes of study. Moreover, they should allow students to integrate discipline-based knowledge and general skills. More importantly, they should increase the students’ awareness of what they should be able to achieve by the end of their studies. In addition to this, learning outcomes should provide clear information to employers and Higher Education Institutions on achievements of that particular student, and the characteristics associated with particular qualifications and hence better their chances of career progression and/or possibility of further studies

#### *Mobility*

Good use of learning outcomes improves the transparency of the qualifications achieved by the students, allowing for simpler credit transfer through easier recognition of qualifications. These can also allow for multiple routes through the educational systems thus promoting lifelong learning.

#### *Quality Assurance*

Learning outcomes allow for increased transparency and comparability of standards within qualifications and act as benchmarks for the assessment of those standards.

The group also considered the importance of assessing the effectiveness of the stated learning outcomes against:

- a. the results obtained by students;
- b. students' evaluation of their own learning experience;
- c. students' perception as to their degree of preparedness for the labour market; and
- d. the extent to which employers are satisfied with graduates' preparedness for the job market.

### 3.2 Group B Discussion, led by Dr. Anthony John Vickers, Bologna Expert

The following topics were discussed by this group:

1. Quality assurance and accreditation of private education providers,
2. Accreditation of further and vocational training,
3. How to devise learning assessment to measure whether a learning outcome has actually been achieved,
4. Checking across modules,
5. Student involvement in quality assurance.

#### *Quality Assurance and Accreditation of private education providers*

This topic usually falls within the remits of a national quality assurance agency. Both public and private providers tend to register their courses with the recognition centres in their respective countries. It is a national responsibility to understand the quality assurance process. It is not uncommon to find universities that have a quality assurance agency which is owned by the same university. One might question however if this system truly ensures quality assurance. In this regard, good quality assurance might be provided if there is enough independence.

The main problem with quality assurance procedures is not only introducing them, but also implementing them in the actual institutions. Nevertheless, it is important to have some way of moderating what the private sector does and what the public sector requires. Thus even if it is more difficult for the smaller organisations, quality assurance should nonetheless be there.

#### *Accreditation of vocational training*

The Blooms taxonomy is not strictly related to Higher Education only, but it is a cognitive taxonomy which should be transposable. Thinking in terms of learning outcomes or competences, simply reflects the division between Higher Education and vocational education. The latter however, should be interchangeable in order for learning outcomes to be used for both academic and vocational courses. It is important that stakeholders involved in the different areas must ask themselves what the appropriate learning outcomes for each individual level of study are.

One might ask how a vocational course can be transposed into Higher Education. The level of the study unit should not matter, what matters truly is the transparency of the whole process. The learning outcomes descriptors are similar to the Diploma Supplement. The latter describes the degree in detail and in the most comparable way possible. Students should find both Learning Outcomes and the Diploma Supplement more valuable as they move around the world to further their studies or to find employment.

#### *Assessment*

A good practice example was given from the Edinburgh Napier University where assessment and teaching methodology are broken down more clearly within the module. This holistic approach in writing learning outcomes allows them to be more easily measurable and the assessment mechanisms should also be comparable.

These should be written in a way that can be actively and dynamically used. These should not be just a delivery of theory, but they should include work, i.e. hands on experience as well as theory. This focus should be kept at the forefront since it is also a huge learning curve for the stakeholders.

The way in which the learning outcomes are written may be subject to the specific module. Therefore, taking the ability to work in a team as an example, the dynamic measure of teamwork would have to be spread-out. The assessments submitted in this case would not necessarily be the actual product of assessment for the learning outcome in this module. These can be assessed through different means. So the assessment criteria are built around the learning outcomes.

### *Learning Outcomes across modules*

A professional body can also provide a set of learning outcomes that need to be met. These forms can be reviewed by academics whilst the learning outcomes required by the professional body and the mode of assessment can be determined accordingly. The module maps are built on the actual learning outcomes which are also required on the practical side.

One of the main issues of writing learning outcomes is that very often the aims of a module and the learning outcomes overlap. Learning outcomes should be extracted from the aims. The aims should be very generic at programme level, whilst they should be very specific at module level.

Traditionally, across the world, most academic programmes do not have a pedagogical thread that runs through the whole department. If academics don't take ownership over the pedagogy, then there will be no consistency in the programmes. The UK educational sector recognized that unless this system was adopted, the state would have to take action. In this context, the stakeholders agreed to a semi-autonomous quality assurance agency which is not a governmental body, but neither a university body. The university recognized that this was beneficial; since this limits the political interference into the grading systems and the learning outcomes.

### *Student Involvement*

Some alternative to evaluation forms were discussed; the standard means in the UK is a staff-student liaison committee. This does lead to some problems, especially when there is a handover. Student Unions should train representatives to allow for constructive comments from students.

The students need to understand what it means to write learning outcomes. In the UK, unions would have their own training. The NUS-UK does this through the provision of toolkits for local unions.

In addition to this, it is apt to note that the involvement of students is a consistent thing within the whole EHEA as it differs quite greatly within the different countries.

## **3.3 Tour de tables and final remarks on workshops**

### ***Group A report***

The discussion started with the following question raised by one of the participants - "How does one know that learning outcomes were truly achieved?"

Learning outcomes help the students understand what they will know and be able to do at the end of a study unit. On the other hand, learning outcomes also provide information to the institution regarding where the students should be heading and what they should learn. One needs to look at attrition rates, progression rates throughout the learning process. It was also pointed out that graduates should be prepared for the labour market. In this context it is imperative that learning outcomes are written by also keeping in mind the students' employability at the end of the course.

**Group B report**

5 topics were discussed during this working group. These are:

- Quality assuring private institutions

Any educational institution within a country's boundaries ought to have a quality assurance mechanism. Clearly how the quality assurance is organized should be reflected within the European Standards and Guidelines.

- Learning outcomes in Further Education and Vocational Education & Training

The methodologies used should expand over all levels of education. Learning outcomes maps for degree programmes can be informative both for students and the academics who draft the said programmes. One should be able to get a good impression of what one is doing by looking at the way they are mapped.

- Asserting that learning outcomes have been achieved

Every student who passes a specific module is looked at in terms of LOs. Often the LOs may be used to express what the best students can achieve. So one can get a detailed theoretical debate – but one must look at what can be achieved through transparent tools. Clear and transparent grading criteria are also equally important. There is also the need of learning assessment and grading criteria to have a full appreciation of how the whole system works.

- Collective Pedagogy

All faculties should have a learning and teaching event for academics and the institution should hold a one week symposium in which staff members can participate in interdepartmental training.

The issue of student involvement was also discussed. It was stated that there should be student involvement and student training. This usually falls under the competence of the national union of students. The creation of student liaison committees was also mentioned.



## **4. Outcomes of the Meeting**

In the concluding remarks, the outcomes of the activity were highlighted. These include the use of ECTS and Learning outcomes in the promotion of quality assurance for both Further and Higher Education Institutions.

Speakers and participants agreed that the transparency of properly written learning outcomes should result in employability for the students, even through the provision of Diploma Supplements.

In addition, the current global context of the financial crisis was also mentioned, where it was stated that students in a number of EU countries need to make a choice in terms of which educational institution they will join. The need for transparency in education is evermore growing. This is not only a question of choice, but also a question of value for money. In addition to this, it must be said that all degrees obtained from these institutions should be recognized across Europe and internationally.

### **4.1 Recommendations**

The outcomes of this activity have highlighted the need for a quality culture in Higher Education in Malta. This can only be achieved through adequate quality assurance procedures within Further and Higher Education Institutions as well as a quality assurance framework at national level. In addition to this extra-governmental bodies should also be set up, to oversee the quality assurance systems and learning outcomes procedures.

It is only through the setting up of a National Quality Assurance Agency, also monitoring the National Qualifications Framework, that the Government's vision of Malta as a Centre of Excellence in Higher Education by 2015 can be achieved.



# Employability: A National Bologna Expert Session

## 5. Objectives of Activity

The main objectives of the National Bologna Expert Session were:

- To discuss the role that Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter referred to as HEIs) should play in increasing transversal competences;
- To establish how cooperation between HEIs, government, government agencies and employers in Malta can be improved and suggest ways to establish a structured dialogue; and
- To share best practices regarding work placements and 'on the job' training.

The main focus was the relevance of Higher Education to employability in the context of a changing and challenging labour market. Cooperation between HEIs and employers is of the utmost importance in order to achieve higher employment rates, particularly amongst graduate students. This collaboration is further needed to identify curricula based on a learning outcomes approach which enables students to move within the labour market.

With this in mind, the aim of the seminar was therefore to explore how employability can be improved in the light of the three cycle system; the Malta Qualifications Framework and the fields of study mostly relevant to Malta's socio-economic development, especially in view of the current global economic situation. Conclusions were to be drawn on Higher Education Institutions and employers' role to provide ample career guidance and equip students adequately by increasing the number of work placements and work-based learning opportunities.

### 5.1 Target Group / Stakeholders:

This activity was targeted at an audience consisting of all stakeholders in the education sector, particularly professionals involved in Higher Education, as well as employers, employers' associations and trade unions.

Participants included student representatives from the University of Malta and MCAST, lecturers from the Institute of Tourism Studies, doctoral students, representatives from the National Commission for Higher Education, the National Team of Bologna Experts, representatives from the European Union Programmes Agency, Education officers, representatives from public corporations, private industrial companies, employers and representatives from Unions and other professional entities.



## 6. Presentations and Informal Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction by Dr. James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator

Dr James Calleja welcomed the participants and introduced Ms Helene Lagier as the guest speaker for the session. The focus of this National Bologna Expert Session was to evaluate the issue of Employability in view of the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, as agreed upon by the Ministers responsible for Education, within the Bologna Countries, in April 2009. Moreover, during the discussion, participants also took cognizance of current issues and international affairs, which directly or indirectly, affect the labour market. The main aims and objectives of the Communiqué were thus, analyzed to identify how they may be affectively adopted in the national context.

The main points of the Communiqué state that:

- Labour markets are increasingly relying on higher skills levels and transversal competences;
- Employability empowers the individual to fully seize the opportunities in changing labour markets;
- Cooperation is needed between government, HEIs, social partners and students in raising initial qualifications (1st cycle) and maintaining/renewing a skilled workforce;
- HEIs must be more responsive to employers' needs and employers to better understand the educational perspective;
- HEIs, governments, government agencies and employers should improve the provision, accessibility and quality of their careers and employment related guidance services to students and alumni; and
- Work placements and on-the-job learning should be highly encouraged.

Is this dialogue between governments, government agencies and employers present? Should this dialogue be structured, so that it may better address the points of concern of Higher Education and Industry? The four focal points within this debate are:

- Transversal Competencies;
- Cooperation between Government, the Faculty of Education and the Directorates of Education;
- Employers; and
- Higher Skills Levels.

One must also refer to the document 'New Skills for New Jobs',<sup>1</sup> which provides a detailed overview of the roadmap agreed upon by the European Ministers of Education until 2020.

### 6.2 Higher Education and Employability – How can Universities and Governments work together to ensure sustainable employment?

**Ms Helene Lagier, BFUG Member**

Ms Lagier started her presentation by posing a number of questions to the audience regarding the Bologna Process and the employability issue. What are we talking about? What are the European answers, both by the Bologna Process and by the European Union? How can universities and governments help in employability? What does employability really mean? And who are the employers? Which labour market are we talking about

<sup>1</sup> For further information, see *New Skills for New Jobs, Anticipating and Matching Labour Market and Skills Needs*. European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Unit, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, April 2009.

(National/European/International)? The views of stakeholders the points mentioned may vary depending on the position and circumstances of each stakeholder.

According to the latest CEDEFOP survey entitled 'Future Skill Needs in Europe: Medium Term Forecast' which was published in 2008, there have been substantial job losses for low skilled workers whilst the services industry is area sector of the labour market which is experiencing steady growth. Societies need high skilled jobs however the difficulty of equipping highly skilled workers in various sectors still persists. Thus, the need to continuously adapt to the ever-changing labour market is a key priority to ensure employability possibilities.

The Bologna Process is no stranger to the concept of employability. As a matter of fact the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué directly refers to employability following the references found in the Sorbonne Declaration, which paved the way for the Bologna Process.

• **Employability**

*13. With labour markets increasingly relying on higher skill levels and transversal competences, higher education should equip students with the advanced knowledge, skills and competences they need throughout their professional lives. Employability empowers the individual to fully seize the opportunities in changing labour markets. We aim at raising initial qualifications as well as maintaining and renewing a skilled workforce through close cooperation between governments, higher education institutions, social partners and students. This will allow institutions to be more responsive to employers' needs and employers to better understand the educational perspective. Higher Education Institutions, together with governments, government agencies and employers, shall improve the provision, accessibility and quality of their careers and employment related guidance services to students and alumni. We encourage work placements embedded in study programmes as well as on-the-job learning.<sup>2</sup>*

Furthermore, there is the necessity to keep the needs of the labour market in mind as all graduates, whatever their choice of profession, will undoubtedly some day be part of the said labour market. This highlights the need for a learning outcome based approach and transparency tools such as ECTS and the Diploma Supplement to ensure mobility within the labour market.

In Lisbon, the Ministers responsible for education held that Europe should secure more and better jobs in order to establish itself as the most competitive area in the world. Amongst other key issues, the Lisbon Strategy Europe 2020 also discusses vocational education and sets the target of reducing the share of early school leavers to 10% from the current 15% whilst increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 years who have completed tertiary education from 31% to at least 40% by the year 2020.

Henceforth, within such a broad context, universities and governments must be very responsive and collaborative in order to address employability issues. Nonetheless, this focus raises a whole set of concerns, such as:

- Should we have one or two models for Higher Education?
- Should we manage and ensure graduation for flexible and adaptable individuals?
- Should we constantly reshape the Higher Education model?
- Should we advise our Ministers that we should only adopt the Vocational Higher Education models?
- What is there beyond education?

<sup>2</sup> Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, p. 3.

- Should degrees be only relevant to the labour industry?
- Does only employability matter?
- What about deskilling?
- Should University programmes only be market driven?

A Higher Education system should be diverse so as to reach beyond employability, whilst being coherent in developing bridges between different spheres. As already mentioned above, the promotion of the concept of lifelong learning is crucial within the said circumstances. The European Universities Association (EUA) Charter for Lifelong Learning, published in 2008, calls on governments and universities to commit to actions, which promote a culture conducive of lifelong learning, namely:

- Embedding concepts of widening access and lifelong learning in their institutional strategies;
- Providing education and learning to a diversified student population;
- Adapting study programmes to ensure that they are designed to widen participation and attract returning adult learners;
- Providing appropriate guidance and counselling services;
- Recognizing prior learning;
- Embracing lifelong learning in quality culture;
- Strengthening the relationship between research, teaching and innovation in a perspective of lifelong learning;
- Consolidating reforms to promote a flexible and creative learning environment for all students;
- Developing partnerships at local, regional, national and international level to provide attractive and relevant programmes; and
- Acting as role models of lifelong learning institutions.

Ms Lagier concluded by identifying seven key actions as areas which are of key priority. These are:

- i. Knowing Better – What are our needs? What are the job requirements?
- ii. Quality of Education – A qualitative education is a must, whatever the model of the chosen system of Higher Education and Higher Education degrees.
- iii. Autonomy – The autonomy of each university is necessary so that each university is able to establish its own profile and strategy, as distinct from other universities.
- iv. Teaching and Learning – Teaching methods should focus further on case studies and solving facts. This complements the theory and may be achieved by inviting guest speakers and grass-root practitioners to address students. The emphasis should be placed on the combination of transversal core skills and specialized subject-related skills. It is also very important for HEIs to provide flexible learning paths whilst allowing for a new combination of field areas such as law and languages, biology and ethics, and history and data-computer.
- v. Transparency – A learning based approach solidifies and clarifies the concepts of mobility, transparency and comparability of qualifications, in view of the National Qualification Frameworks in an attempt to establish the common definition of a given degree.
- vi. Lifelong Learning – The widening of access and participation to Higher Education is an important concept in lifelong learning. One must also strive to recognize prior learning by making it possible to develop

programmes based on the recognition of prior learning and the individual's competences and development plans.

- vii. Research – There must be wider dissemination (easier flow) of research outcomes into society. On the other hand, one must also address the issues of employability of Ph.D graduates.

In her concluding comments, Ms Lagier insisted on empowering students by providing them with a mindset of critical learning and mind-solving capacities and initiatives. This would enable them to move easily both horizontally and vertically within the labour market. Moreover, she reiterated that an ongoing dialogue with the relevant stakeholders is a necessity within a trustworthy relationship of shared responsibility.

### **6.3 Question Time and Discussion chaired by Dr James Calleja, NTBE Coordinator**

One of the participants enquired about whether there are any employment mechanisms in place for students when placements are not available. In reply it was argued that this is an important issue because work placements might not always be available. This is difficult to tackle in certain areas, as one must start from scratch in building relationships with individuals in the industry and the officers at University. However, it is important to support students in finding opportunities such as work placements. This may be done through the compilation of a register or by advertising vacancies and internships at the University. Students also need to be helped in preparing basic documentation needed in job recruitment procedures, such as updated CVs, letters of application etc.

Another participant enquired about any existing structures dedicated to the dialogue between universities and employers. In reply it was explained that in France for example, social partners are also members of committees and other university bodies in an attempt to share good practises and understand better each other's situation.

A member of the audience asked about any compiled information regarding the relationship between employability and the license to practise. Where do the regulatory and professional bodies come in? In reply it was stated that this issue is very important, especially with reference to professional recognition. It was also commented that Malta has been very fortunate to have moved from a passive to an active approach as one of the proposals to the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family has been that of setting up a Sector Skills Council.

Another participant commented that when speaking about education and employability, the link and bond that should be present between the labour market and education must be outlined. Nonetheless, how tight and how loose should this bond be? In view of this, attention must be paid to the relationship between Higher Education and the labour market, as education should also be part of self-development and not simply a means to the labour market. In reply it was agreed that employability is only one aspect, of education, along many others.

It was also mentioned that at times, the participation of the labour market is not wholly accepted by the education sector. Finally it was agreed that one has to move towards a professionally oriented movement. This is a matter of understanding from both sides professors should be provided with more insight on enterprises to facilitate the relationship between academia and the world of work.



## 7. Discussion Panel

### 7.1 Chairperson Professor Alfred Vella (UoM)

Chairperson Prof Alfred Vella commenced the second part of the session by saying that he is in utmost agreement that universities should not act as 'ivory towers'. However, one must recognize that universities are frequently criticised for providing theoretical knowledge without any practical experience.

Moreover, Prof Vella then shared some thoughts and points of concern, which he asked the speakers to focus upon when addressing participants. Why should there be a strong link between a particular place of work and university training? The strength of a university degree (be it engineering or arts and literature) is to give students the ability to tackle a changing world. Universities do not teach rules and methods of working and interacting with colleagues, which are today considered very important in the labour market. Nonetheless, universities train students to be responsive to change by giving them the generic skills required to survive in the labour market. A university should be the 'place' to encourage students to think, communicate well, work in teams and be critical. Unfortunately, university students may not appreciate teamwork; however, there are skills which may only be learnt through participation in teamwork activities.

The factor that distinguishes universities from other HEIs is that universities impart knowledge and not simply teaching methods, and thus, go beyond the notion of employability. Universities should be allowed to speak their minds, even when what they are saying is not congruent with other stakeholders, such as political parties. University students should be allowed to speak their minds, using their critical and motive powers.

### 7.2 Ing. Ray Muscat (Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry)

Ing. Muscat provided a brief overview of the Malta Chamber of Commerce<sup>3</sup>, its workings and relationships with other stakeholders. Ing. Muscat spoke of the good relationship the Chamber enjoys with MCAST, the University of Malta and the University Business Forum and emphasized that knowledge transfer and business opportunities have to co-exist.

Innovation is also necessary in this regard, as this is more linked with enterprise, rather than with academia. Although links between the labour market and education are a bit difficult, there are best practises, which may be shared in order to establish a successful and affective link. One good example, from the UK is the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP)<sup>4</sup>. These programmes, guided by professors, are supported by a funding scheme and students are helped to invest in the necessary infrastructure. Nonetheless, professors/department also benefit from a share of 10%, in order to render the programme equitable for every participant.

The element of equitability is crucial within such partnerships. Therefore, the link must be reasonable for all in order for the relationship to work. Unfortunately, this element is lacking in Malta. It must be recognized that the principal aim of enterprise is to reap profits. However, this issue is also of interest to universities as it is beneficial for students entering the labour market. This may be interpreted as the modern approach to the student-worker scheme.

The industry is definitely in favour of lifelong learning and considers it as a must; however the issue of payment needs to be addressed. Who should pay for lifelong learning? Ing. Muscat stated that the level of studies plays a crucial role in determining who should pay for LLL. First degrees should be funded by the state. However, post-graduate studies, should be funded by the individual and the enterprise in question.

<sup>3</sup> Information on the Chamber of Commerce can be found on: [www.maltachamber.org.mt](http://www.maltachamber.org.mt)

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see <http://www.ktponline.org.uk/>

### 7.3 Mr. Carl Grech (KSU)

Mr. Grech noted that KSU has adopted quite a cautious stance on the pragmatic link between Higher Education and employability as it is of utmost importance that every link should exist to create opportunities for both students and the industry. However, HEIs are there to impart knowledge and not employees. Of course, these should not exclude each other however one should not compromise the other either.

Students must also consider future skills and future employability. The demographic trends such as low birth rates with the consequential shortage of employees in the coming years require long term planning which goes beyond tentative targets. KSU put forward a number of policies about employability and has identified three generic skill sets, namely:

- Basic skills and competences;
- People skills (communication, teamwork, interpersonal); and
- Conceptual skills (organizational etc...).

It must be pointed out that HEIs are not expected to provide students with the above mentioned skills, as these are not skills which ought to be imparted at university level, but much earlier within the educational journey. Expecting students to achieve these skills after completing the educational system may be the wrong approach. A number of initiatives deemed important to provide a holistic education have also been identified. These are:

- Student Centred Learning Environment (in the process of acquiring skills);
- Making learning more attractive;
- Initiatives such as Young Enterprise;
- Foreign language competences;
- Mobility and exchange; and
- Family support (targets the social dimension of the student body).

Two main proposals were brought forward by Mr. Grech as measures which could be adopted in order to facilitate the process of providing students with the competences they would need to become more employable:

1. The Importance of Long Term Planning – This may be summarized as the need to train students for the unexpected. This can be done by establishing long term plans and policies. Of course, any policy decisions should be communicated to the HEIs as soon as such decisions are taken.
2. The Saturation of Certain Areas – Financial Services – One has already allotted a lot of effort in this area on a national level, therefore, Malta must now start identifying other sectors which will be developing in the upcoming years, in order to start training and preparing students for these opportunities.

Mr. Grech commended the University of Malta on their initiative of allowing the general public to discover the University during its open week, and urged the audience present at the seminar to participate in this event.

### 7.4 Mr. Joseph Cutajar (ETC)

Mr. Cutajar explained that in trying to make people more employable, ETC tries to bridge the gaps between industry and education. However, ETC also tries to help those who are not employed and therefore not contributing to the economy. ETC also provide persons with a second opportunity to obtain post-secondary and tertiary qualifications.

Employability is about providing an opportunity to those who are already in employment to achieve further qualifications and upgrade their skills. Certainly, services provided by ETC vary according to the targeted client

groups. The Employment and Training Corporation consults and collaborates with employers in its daily workings to provide persons with the competences needed to retain employment and move within the current labour market.

### **7.5 Mr. Saviour Rizzo (Centre for Labour Studies)**

The centre believes that the term 'employability' refers to qualifications and skills which are commensurate to the present, the future and the unpredicted. When speaking about employability, a number of jobs which can be generated in the future are also being discussed. This is being reflected in current practices with the labour market such as the provision of definite contracts instead of indefinite contracts of employment, which were much more common the past.

Mr. Rizzo stated that we are currently living in a society with higher opportunities but also higher risks regarding our jobs. What is making the market unpredictable? This may be attributed to the volatility of employment and the mobility of capital such as the inward and outward relocation of businesses. The Maltese labour market has passed through a transition phase and is deemed to still be within the industrialization phase. The first phase of industrialization was characterized by high investment in the textile industry. The occupational structure in Malta has also undergone enormous change and this has also affected Gozo with the majority of back offices having been transferred to Gozo.

Furthermore, Mr. Rizzo observed that very often, job specific skills are associated with vocational training. Nonetheless, many of the course programmes at the University of Malta target job specific skills. When one is differentiating between skills, it is clear that the more specific the job is, the easier it is to integrate within the labour market. However, this must not undermine the importance of generic skills.

One must also consider what is referred to as the 'gestation' period of education. Today's investment in education might take months and years to reap results. In Malta, there is not yet an institution, which can monitor and research trends to aid HEIs design study programmes accordingly. Moreover, the country must also adapt to new needs and demands, which arise as a consequence of a newly reached target. An example is the demand for translators and interpreters, due to Malta's membership in the European Union.

### **7.6 Remarks by Ms. Helene Lagier**

Ms. Lagier expressed her agreement with most of the speakers' remarks. She also referred to the demographic challenges of modern day society and mentioned a survey conducted by a Swiss magazine, which, in its aim to establish the meaning of 'being young', concluded that in Europe, the average age is 40.2 whilst in Asia it is of 29 years of age and in Africa, it is set at 35 years of age. Furthermore, she reiterated that the fundamental mission of universities is to provide knowledge. Mr. Lagier commented that EU funds are essential tools for Member States in which can be used to create new and better job opportunities.

The European Tuning Project is a very effective example of a strong relationship between Higher Education and the labour market as this project has been designed by the industry and universities together, and deals with both job-specific and general competences. In line with the Lisbon Strategy, Ms. Lagier held that in order for Europe to win the game, it must upgrade its students and make them more competitive.

### **7.7 Question time and discussion chaired by Dr. James Calleja**

One of the participants asked whether flexible entry to the University of Malta should be strengthened for people in the industry, therefore for people who are already in employment. In reply it was explained that the situation in this regard, must be improved. It is very difficult and complicated to evaluate and assess prior learning. Undoubtedly, assessing and accepting prior learning is a challenge that the University is and shall be facing in the future.

Another participant enquired about concrete answers to theory and rhetoric in view of a very reactive economic environment. It was replied that unfortunately, the country does not really excel in long term planning. One

very good example of acting proactively is that of bringing huge investment to the country in the field of aviation. Politicians secured the investment and MCAST reacted and invested. The University of Malta must likewise exploit such opportunities within sectors such as the pharmaceutical sector. However, there are other areas, which Malta must address. Henceforth, Malta can be proactive in its approach but one must focus on current trends and happenings. The country must transform its competences into higher value services.



## **8. Outcomes of the meeting**

The seminar ensured a healthy dialogue between key stakeholders within the labour market and Higher Education Institutions, mainly the University of Malta and MCAST. Participants from either side of the spectrum were able to bring forward obstacles encountered and proposals for a renewed healthy relationship between the two spheres. However, it was unanimously agreed that the mission of universities and other HEIs remains that of imparting knowledge and providing students with the ability to analyze, criticize and assess.

### **8.1 Recommendations**

The participants of the 'Employability: A National Bologna Process Expert Session' brought forward the following recommendations:

- To set clear parameters to the proposed relationship between academia and the labour market;
- To establish an effective link between Higher Education and the labour market, which is equitable for all stakeholders involved;
- To give much more importance to generic skills together with job-specific skills, creating a combination of 'smart specialization'; and
- To establish long term planning in consultation with HEIs in order to prepare for the necessary training to students.



# Bologna Process: Education, Research and Innovation

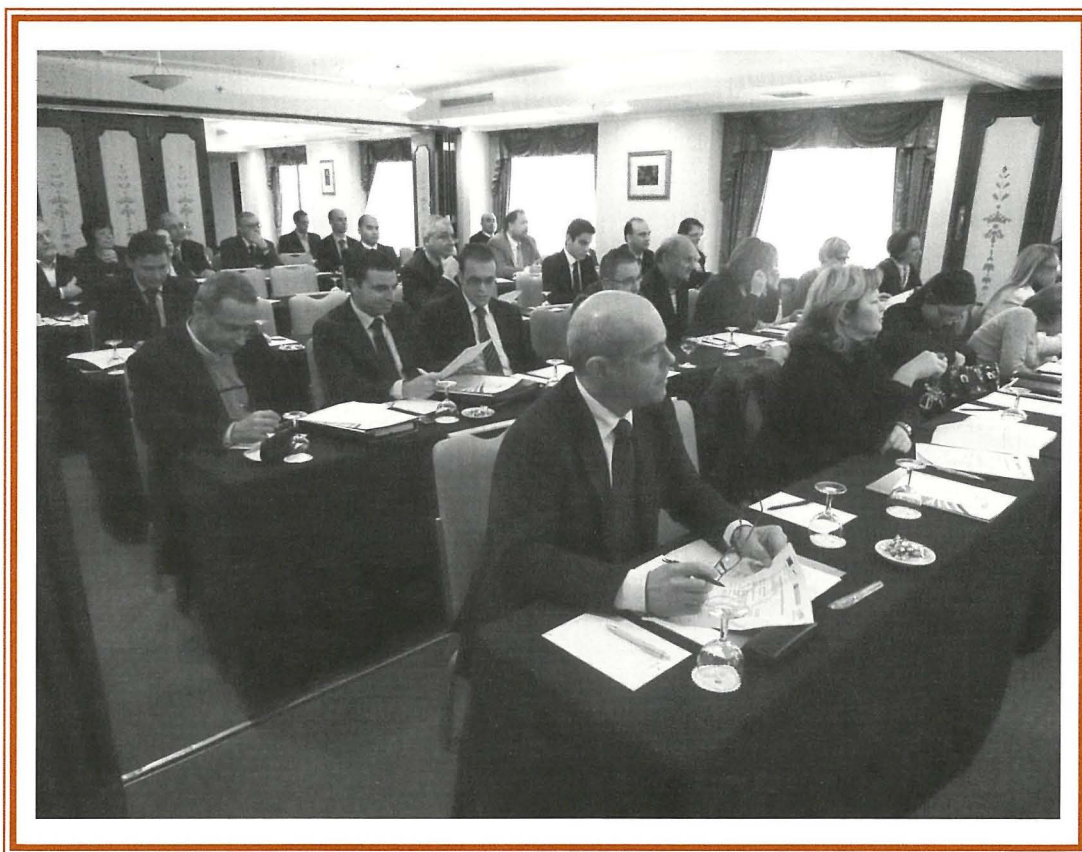
## 9. Objectives of Activity

The main objectives of this seminar revolve around the relevance of Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in the context of the new challenges posed by the ever changing European Higher Education Area (EHEA). These changes emphasise the need for increased and stronger cooperation between European HEI's, with a particular focus on the development of new projects, especially at the doctoral level.

Malta aims to become a centre of excellence in education and research. Several measures need to be taken in order for this objective to be achieved, and this seminar aimed to offer stakeholders in the education sector to discuss these said measures.. Amongst the other objectives of the seminar one can also find: ways to increase the participation rates in post-graduate research-based courses and; the development of new education and research fields relevant to Malta's socio-economic growth.

### 9.1 Target group / Stakeholders

The target audience for the seminar was all 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 Malta College of Arts Science and Technology, doctoral students, retired educators, representatives from the National Commission for Higher Education, representatives from the Malta Qualifications Council, 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, representatives from the industry and private providers.





## 10. Presentations and Informal Discussion

### 10.1 Introduction and Key objectives of the Seminar, by Dr. von Brockdorff, NCHE Chairman

Dr. von Brockdorff started his introduction by listing the various topics mentioned in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué. It was explained to the participants that the seminar served as a contact point for stakeholders on the three pillars of education research and innovation, often referred to as the knowledge triangle. These three are at the heart of the Maltese economy and are necessary to support growth.

It was held that the role of each of these pillars needs to be strengthened and new projects need to be developed particularly at doctoral level. A higher percentage of participation in research based areas particularly in areas which are necessary for Malta's socio economic growth is necessary for Malta to become a niche in these areas.

Dr. von Brockdorff held that these three pillars are important interdependent factors on which a knowledge-based society is built. In the communiqué, improvement in education, research and innovation was identified as one of the key priorities for Higher Education. Particular emphasis is made on high standard research which should be available at all levels of Higher Education and on the required need for people with key research skills and competences.

The communiqué also refers to the need for more high quality doctoral programmes in research, which need to be complemented by inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral programmes. In this regard, HEIs need to provide adequate facilities to promote, foster and enhance research studies. The communiqué specifically states that:

**In order to bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, a dynamic and flexible European higher education will strive for innovation on the basis of the integration between education and research at all levels.**

In Malta, the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) devised a strategy highlighting the key developments needed, in line also with the EU 2020 targets. One of the key objectives of the strategy was to make Malta a main centre of excellence in research and education.

The strategy states that excellence should be defined according to the knowledge triangle and that the development of a "quality culture" was also needed within the institutions along with the establishment of an external quality assurance framework which was a necessary pre-requisite for the achievement of this goal.

Dr. von Brockdorff stated that quality also implies a link between teaching and research and this gives the University of Malta a key responsibility in this objective. Quality assurance as a basis for recognition is essential in reaching this objective.

In the Budapest/Vienna Declaration, which officially launched the European Higher Education Area in 2010, Education Ministers reaffirmed their beliefs by stating that:

**We are convinced that higher education is a major driver for social and economic development and for innovation in an increasingly knowledge-driven world.**

Dr. von Brockdorff concluded his speech by stating that this seminar should serve as a platform where representatives of HEI's discuss how they can equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences and how these institutions can improve their facilities to attract more students who are following research studies.

## 10.2 Blended Learning and partnerships – framing the qualifications

### Mr. Johny Lauritsen, Dean Research, & Development, University College Sjaelland, Denmark

The aim of the speech was to present the Danish educational system and to discuss the problems that are faced by this system and any solutions which are common to both the Maltese and Danish education systems.

Mr Lauritsen described Denmark's socio economic background, giving particular emphasis on the Higher Education system in Denmark. The demographic issue of an older population in Denmark was also mentioned. In this respect it was pointed out that there are more well-educated people leaving employment than youngsters entering into HE, therefore more pensions and more youngsters on lower wages. This means that there is a higher need for mobilisation of the private sector, partnerships and user (market) driven innovation.

An explanation was given regarding the two systems of Higher Education that exist in Denmark. The first is the ordinary system where one develops from Bachelor onto Ph.D level. The other is the LLL route where students start with a Diploma.

Students in Denmark do not pay for ordinary Universities and in addition to this they receive a stipend of approximately EUR 500 per month.

An overview of the Regional University of Applied Science in Denmark was also given. It was stated that this university currently has around 7,500 students with courses available in Nursing, Education, Health and Nutrition, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Medical Lab, Social Services, Tourism and Management. It was moreover stated that this university is in a partnership with one region, 17 local communities, 2 universities and a regional technical and business academy. Moreover, it has Memorandums of understanding with the government of Vietnam and a number of companies. It is structured in 4 campuses in 4 provincial cities and its courses are provided through 3 centres of knowledge.

An overview of the Europe 2020 was also given as a strategy for smart and sustainable growth. It was held that this policy aims at developing an economy that is based on: knowledge and innovation; inclusive and high-employment and; the promotion of a greener and more competitive economy. The particular targets of this policy are that: 75% of the people living in the EU should be employed by 2020; the number of early school leavers being reduced to fewer than 10% and; at least 40% of the younger generation having obtained a tertiary degree. A particular mention was made for the flagship initiative of the Youth on the Move that aims to widen learning and mobility for young people. The mobility benchmark of achieving 20% student mobility by 2020 was also mentioned and Mr. Lauritsen also stated that this is enforced through an impending cut of 20% of the budget if this target is not achieved.

Mr. Lauritsen also pointed out there are not enough young people in Higher Education. He specified that in many cases curricula are not up to date, transparent or comparable enough and that they are not adapted to the needs of the labour market. In addition to this, Higher Education is currently too fragmented, over-regulated and not well-funded. Moreover, in order to achieve the Europe 2020 targets, a higher number of adults should be able to participate in Higher Education through Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Lauritsen went on to discuss the paradigm shift from teacher centred to student centred learning. It was explained that qualifications frameworks and the EU use the terminology of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competences'. Before 2005/06 the knowledge was defined on the learning, the concepts, theory, methods and practice in research and science from a Bachelor's Degree to a Ph.D. The HEIs were viewing every student as a potential researcher. The curricula were written in a way that reflects only the needs of the academic world.

The Humboldt tradition is the continental Germanic tradition to study hard in an individually centred manner, and keep on studying for the rest of your life. The programme is fixed and your teacher is your master.

The Anglo American system on the other hand is one where students take courses, choose their own way through the study programmes and only follow courses which are deemed mostly interesting.

The problem in the education system in Denmark is that the study programmes and progress is not outlined with the feedback of the students. New technology, new and diverse teaching and communication methods need to be used to entice more students into Higher Education.

The student centred teaching or learning is another debated issue in Denmark. Within the learning outcomes context, knowledge, skills and competences needed to be described in order to provide a more student centred approach. These had to be described in terms of both academic and non academic focuses. The focus is on what the professional is expected to know and be able to do in relation to his qualifications.

Mr. Lauritsen also gave a detailed explanation of the Quality Framework in Denmark for the years 2010/2011. The national EQF is built on 8 levels, from primary education (1) to Ph.D (8).

The accreditation procedure takes place every 4 to 5 years for each programme. There are 17 criteria to be met. This translates into a lot of documentation, the relevance of which is being questioned within many HEIs.

In Denmark, HEIs are accredited according to the percentage of staff working in research and development and the number of publications, amongst other things. If an institution fails to be accredited, then it has 9 months to improve and reach the designated criteria or it will otherwise lose the right to teach a particular programme, thereby resulting also in budget cuts.

Mr. Lauritsen explained the reasons behind *Blended learning*. One of the challenges faced by the current educational system in Denmark is that parliament cuts 1% per annum of the allocated budget. This translates into more mergers, more students, and lesser teachers. Since 1998 there has been a decrease of about 20% of the academic staff in HEIs. This was addressed through increased e-learning modules which run parallel to the ordinary learning.

A number of social dimension challenges faced by the student body were identified. These include: transportation for students; time for part-time jobs and; quality time with the family. This issue was addressed by creating a structure in which half the students attend lectures from Monday to Wednesday and the other half from Wednesday to Friday. E-learning projects are also catered for in the rest of the days.

It was held that this shift also necessitated a change in the curricula, where the content description is related to science, research and professional methods, resulting in a properly structured learning outcome.

Mr. Lauritsen concluded his presentation by stating that one must live with the concept that dynamic knowledge is experimental and that everyone must work in a more intelligent, sustainable and inclusive manner.

### **10.3 Question time and discussion, chaired by Dr. Philip von Brockdorff, NCHE Chairman**

Dr. Von Brockdorff opened the Question Session by drawing a number of comparisons between Malta and Denmark, stating that both countries are facing the financial and economic crisis. The demographic change is also noticed in both countries, and this will have an impact in terms of the participation rates in Higher Education. It was however held that this may show an actual increase in the participation rates.

It was held that Malta saw an increased number of females at the University of Malta with the proportions being around 55% to 45%. In the faculty of education most of the graduates are women. Malta also has a Qualifications Framework which is based on the European Qualifications Framework. The University of Malta is more focussed on research. In terms of developments there is an increased focus on research at the University and MCAST. There is also concern in terms of the learning outcomes and comparability of qualifications.

It was reported that 15% of students leave the University before taking their first year exams in Denmark, a figure similar to that of Malta. Thus it was held that the most reliable figure of student participation in tertiary education can be deduced after the first session of examinations.

A member of the audience asked about specific methods that best prepare Ph.D candidates to work in industry. It was held that research was made into what literature states on this matter and also on what employers think regarding this matter. The reality is that many Ph.D graduates work in academia but the reality is that industry needs more Ph.D researchers. Many times the staff and the researches at university are more oriented towards working in academia whilst many students believe that their future lies within the industry rather than in academia. At the moment the Malta Council for Science and Technology is looking at creating more transverse skills like entrepreneurship, finance, career management, etc. The question is whether academic staff is expected to have a closer link with industry as many times employers do not appreciate the value of a Ph.D graduate. Moreover, it was asked whether there existed any models of career guidance for Ph.D students that help the transition from academia into more industry grounded work.

In reply to this question it was stated that the short answer would be no as it is very difficult to get a connection between the academic world and the industry, unless the industry pays. It was explained that in Denmark one way of addressing this issue is that government supports the industry in Ph.D If the industry pays 2/3 of the cost, the state pays 1/3 of the costs.

Another way in which Ph.D research is carried out in Denmark is through state funding for research in niche areas. There is a provision of approximately EUR 400,000 in relation to Ph.Ds in the financial sector to create a more market driven economy. The rationale behind this is to move academia closer to the practical world of work.

It was held that such research in Malta can be funded through MGSS or STEPS schemes that are both fully in line with the national strategic framework and the strategic objectives of the Maltese economy.

Another participant enquired about the development of creativity and innovation skills in students. It was held that students are asked to demonstrate creativity and innovation skills at tertiary levels of education when the whole schooling process would have made them teacher dependant. Creativity is only mentioned and it is only limited to the traditional humanistic areas and there is nothing whatsoever in any country that deals with creativity in no educational area. Everyone speaks of creativity and innovation as an outcome but in the process there is very limited investment in the formation of these skills.

It was explained that in Denmark the creative skills seem to be given lesser importance in the educational process and the impression given is that pupils are not achieving much from 'learning by doing' and that theoretical skills are more important. It was held that creativity cannot be produced, but rather be the result of a situation. In Denmark, the Ministry of Education has put forward projects in which artists themselves educate the pupils, even if this faced severe reluctance from teachers' unions.

## 11. Workshop and Informal Discussion

The workshop started with an enquiry on the accreditation system of HEIs in Denmark. It was explained that the accreditation agency in Denmark is making experiments on how obtain automated statistics and create documentation for the particular institution. The importance of self-evaluation within quality assurance systems was also highlighted.

One of the speakers asked whether Malta had a level of self evaluation. In reply it was stated that this exists and that it is through proper self evaluation that an accreditation agency can properly do its work. It was pointed out that self-evaluation is a crucial and that such information is needed in order to evaluate and better the work of the academics. It was held that there are teachers or researchers in Denmark who have been evaluating their work for centuries. However such information was never made public. In addition to this, it was asked whether evidence based research existed showing that Quality assurance systems and other mechanisms such as ECTS are actually improving the education system. It was held that since these and similar mechanisms have been put in place only recently, such conclusive results have not yet been produced.

It was held that financial support serves for two major reasons – the first is that when it comes to funding, a proper QA exercise should allow for the creation of clear documentation that shows the level of quality and therefore justify more funding for research. Without this exercise, it becomes impossible to ask and justify the need for more funding. Secondly, this process if done well with an emphasis on moral responsibility, would serve to attract better students following research programmes to the institution.

It was moreover held that dialogue together with the critical overview of the improvement need to be carried out periodically. It was stated that this is a way to include the students, rather than simply viewing them as passive receptors of the educational process.

Another participant stated that it is still too early to review the changes brought by the Bologna Process but that there is extensive research that shows that unless the staff has ownership of the reforms, the desired changes will not work. Thus the persons involved must understand what the changes are and must be convinced that they are necessary. Thus the crucial element for successful implementation of these changes was held to be the ownership by the staff and a bottom-up approach.

It was moreover asserted that there will always be a number of academics who will accept professional development and that a number of others will be against it. One of the key elements of success has been the egalitarian dialogue and the involvement of all stakeholders. When parents, community leaders, students, sit down together with the aim of achieving the desired progress together, success is achieved in a short period time. Dialogue must be present in all the directions through the systems, but most importantly this should exist with the staff directly.

A participant held that most of the time everyone talks about the lack of participation of adults in lifelong learning. However the real issue is whether institutions recognize the need for adult learners. The problems are varied in nature and may include the over assessment of a student. But the quality of the work that students give back when finishing the course is another issue. The problem with some faculties is that most of the courses are based too strongly on theory and not enough of practice.

Another participant also referred to the concept of lifelong learning and flexible pathways with particular focus on those people who work and study at the same time. It was held that institutions have to find new models that accommodate the learners better.

In reply it was stated that HEIs need to aspire to HEIs in countries that have increased levels of participation. The latter have been able to provide high quality education to the non traditional learners. The educational system in Malta is not producing just enough students to make sure that the lecture theatres at the University remain full. MCAST is picking up where these people are falling by the wayside but, in terms of the participation rates, it was held that this is still not enough. Institutions have to help people in the working industry and flexibility is required

for these type of students as day sessions are not always suitable for them. Moreover, the prior learning achieved by these persons needs to be validated, taken into account and built into a learning pathway that is individually catered for the particular student/s. Nevertheless it was stated that academics are not used to this approach; the face-to-face approach is the one that academics have been using and the one that they are used to but institutions need to be more reactive to these changing needs. Evening programmes already exist at the University of Malta however changes to this system are still required to make it more suitable for a greater number of people.

It was moreover pointed out that in one particular University in Denmark; there are two nursing programmes available, an ordinary programme and an e-learning programme. Students following the latter meet four days every month and throughout the rest of the month follow their classes online, through which some evaluation also takes place.

Students following the 'ordinary' programme get an increased level of social contact. Through the e-learning programme, students get the opportunity to write, discuss and talk about the material that was made available to them. During the four days per month in which students meet, they could ask more detailed questions about the material. Moreover it was found that this process led to an increase in the creativity of the students, leading to a much more intensive learning process for the students. In addition to this it was established that students gained better writing skills when following the e-learning programme. The students studying through e-learning were divided according to geographical location to facilitate the possibility of students meeting up in between sessions. It was subsequently found that the grades obtained by these students compared relatively well to the grades obtained by the students following the same course on an 'ordinary' basis. Thus, more flexible learning pathways may result in increased participation that can be controlled, evaluated and render great results.

Students present reiterated that there is a difference between the ordinary and the e-learning programme. It was stated that if a programme is done mostly through e-learning, then the evaluation has to be formalised. It was moreover stressed that the review of study modules by students was mainly carried out through an online survey at the University of Malta which not many students participate in.

In one particular university in Denmark, the same type of evaluation carried out by students had been used three times. The first time around, the response rate was only 22%, subsequent to which an informational campaign was set up. This brought the figure up to 35%. In the third year, teachers were asked to establish teaching through qualitative methods and use this as a measuring tool, which served to bring up the student participation in the evaluation to 60%, however online questionnaires are not enough.. Focus interviews are needed in order to qualify the questionnaires. The next stage after the collection of the data should be the use of the knowledge through dialogue with staff and students to bring about the necessary changes.

The importance of networking was also highlighted. Research shows that the communities of learning are being very effective for professional development. This mode of thinking should also pose new challenges at University level.

## **12. Outcomes of the Meeting**

Dr. von Brockdorff brought the discussion to a close by stating that the Bologna Process is here to stay, since it has affected students, institutions and politicians. One might also argue that the sooner the adoption of the Bologna initiatives, the better. This may be true and it is formally true but the change must engage all stakeholders, students, academics, involved in the shaping of Higher Education. This is to ensure that the Bologna Process objectives are understood and owned by all stakeholders concerned.

### **12.1 Recommendations**

The outcomes of this seminar highlight the importance of dialogue between all the stakeholders to Higher Education. Numerous interventions from speakers and also from members present reiterated the concept that development in the institutions as well as the necessary paradigm shift required for student centred learning can only be brought about through structured dialogue that should reap greater results in terms of the objectives of Education, Research and Innovation.

One must also point out that for these objectives to be achieved at a trans-national level, structured dialogue should not only be limited to horizontal dialogue with similar entities, but also with vertical dialogue occurring between the regulators, the institutions, academics, staff and most importantly students.

Structured dialogue can only occur through the possibility to create specific fora, accommodating all the relevant stakeholders. It is through such initiatives that the policy goals of the Bologna Process and the EU 2020 can be achieved.

## 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

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>APQRU</b>  | Academic Programmes Quality and Resources Unit                     |
| <b>BFUG</b>   | Bologna Follow-up Group  |
| <b>DS</b>     | Diploma Supplement   |
| <b>ECTS</b>   | European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System                   |
| <b>EHEA</b>   | European Higher Education Area                                     |
| <b>EQAR</b>   | European Quality Assurance Register                                |
| <b>EQF</b>    | European Qualifications Framework                                  |
| <b>ESG</b>    | European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance            |
| <b>ETC</b>    | Employment and Training Corporation                                |
| <b>EUPA</b>   | European Union Programmes Agency                                   |
| <b>HEIs</b>   | Higher Education Institutions                                      |
| <b>ITS</b>    | Institute of Tourism Studies                                       |
| <b>KSU</b>    | Kunsill tal-iStudenti Universitarji (University Students' Council) |
| <b>KTP</b>    | Knowledge Transfer Partnerships                                    |
| <b>LLL</b>    | Lifelong Learning  |
| <b>LOs</b>    | Learning Outcomes  |
| <b>MCAST</b>  | Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology                      |
| <b>MEEF</b>   | Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family                   |
| <b>MGSS</b>   | Malta Government Scholarships Scheme                               |
| <b>MQC</b>    | Malta Qualifications Council                                       |
| <b>MQF</b>    | Malta Qualifications Framework                                     |
| <b>NCHE</b>   | National Commission for Higher Education                           |
| <b>NTBE</b>   | National Team of Bologna Experts                                   |
| <b>NUS-UK</b> | National Union of Students – United Kingdom                        |
| <b>STEPS</b>  | Strategic Educational Pathways Scholarships                        |
| <b>UoM</b>    | University of Malta  |
| <b>VET</b>    | Vocational Education and Training                                  |



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