

## International Student Mobility in Europe in the Context of the Bologna Process

Ulrich Teichler  
University of Kassel, Germany

The Bologna Process is the newest of a chain of activities stimulated by supra-national actors since the 1950s to challenge national borders in higher education in Europe. Now, the ministers in charge of higher education of the individual European countries agreed to promote a similar cycle-structure of study programmes and programmes based on the strategic aim to enhance student mobility in two directions: to increase the attractiveness for students from other parts of the world to study – primarily for the whole study programme - in European countries and to facilitate intra-European – primarily temporary – mobility. Studies aiming at establishing the results of this policy face various problems. Statistics move only gradually from “foreign” to “mobile” students, but remain insufficient with respect to temporary mobility. Individual European countries opt for so varied solutions that an overall overview is hardly feasible. Yet, some general trends are visible. First, Bologna contributed to increased inwards mobility of students from other parts of the world, but not to a more rapid increase of intra-European student mobility. Second, the event of outwards mobility during the course of study up to graduation has turned out to be more frequent than expected by many experts, but differences by country do not fade away. Third, the value of student mobility gradually declines as a consequence of gradual loss of exclusiveness.

*Keywords:* Bologna Process, foreign students, international organizations, professional mobility, student mobility

### **Continuous Efforts to Challenge National Borders in Higher Education**

The *essence* of higher education can be viewed as *not being confined by borders*. Knowledge in various fields and the logic of science are universal; search for new knowledge ideally is not limited by borders; universities are more international in scope than most other organizations, and many scholars harbour cosmopolitan views. However, the *structure and the organisation* of higher education is strongly *shaped by individual countries* (or even regional bodies within countries) and cultures, among others funding, the regulatory framework, governance, curricula and credentials (see Kerr 1990). The term “higher education system”, as a rule, is employed to depict a national system of higher education (see Teichler 2007).

Since the end of World War II, repeated activities have been undertaken in the various European countries to counteract the idiosyncrasies and the relative isolation of national systems of higher education. Such policies were promoted by different *supra-national actors* as a short glance on the five most influential activities within four stages of development will show (see Teichler 2010).

In the first stage, efforts were made to increase the *mutual understanding* between the various European countries. In this framework, activities to *facilitate student mobility* played a dominant role in the hope that more detailed knowledge of other countries would dilute prejudices and increase sympathy for other ways of life and thinking. In Western Europe, the *Council of Europe* was active

since the early 1950s to facilitate mobility through conventions signed and ratified by individual countries for the *recognition of study* – more precisely for the recognition of prior education as entry qualification to higher education, of periods of study for mobile students during the course of study, and of degrees for mobile graduates. Similar activities were undertaken by Eastern European countries, since the 1970s for all European countries through the cooperation between the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and eventually in 1997 through the Lisbon Convention for the recognition of studies initiated again by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, this time in cooperation with the European Commission (see Teichler, 2003).

In the second stage, since the 1960s, most Western European countries as well as market-oriented economically advanced countries outside Europe have collaborated in the search for best ways to stimulate and accommodate the *quantitative expansion of student enrolment* in higher education thereby both aiming to *contribute to economic growth and to the reduction inequalities of educational opportunity*. The OECD (Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development), a think tank for mutual economic and social advice of these countries, suggested to expand the enrolment capacity of higher education through *the upgrading and the extension of relatively short study programmes* as a rule at institutions without a close link of teaching and research. As a consequence, diversification in higher education through types of higher education began to play a major role in a substantial number of European countries.

The third stage was characterized by increasing *cooperation, mobility* and the search for concerted *European dimensions* of higher education. This has initially been put forward in the European Union since the 1990s. The *ERASMUS programme*, inaugurated in 1987 for the promotion of short-term student mobility within Europe, is the most prominent example of this stage.

In the fourth stage, the *individual European countries jointly* aimed to *pursue similar higher education policies and to strive for a system convergence*. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 called for establishment of a common stage structure of study programmes and degrees. Various other measures, such as the introduction of a credit system, improved information about the value of credentials through a “diploma supplement”, and cooperation in “quality assurance” should contribute to structural convergence without endangering the substantive variety of study programmes and eventually lead to a “European Higher Education Area” by 2010. Subsequently, in the Lisbon Declaration in 2000, the European Council, i.e. the assembly of the heads of governments of the countries of the *European Union*, agreed to cooperate and to take joint measures of investing into research and development and eventually to establish a “European Research Area” by 2010. Notably, public and private expenditures for research and development should be increased on average to three percent of the Gross Domestic Product, thus helping to make Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy of the world”. These European campaigns obviously were ambitious in their intention to increase common characteristics of national higher education systems in Europe.

### **The Signing of the Bologna Declaration**

A major policy move such as the Bologna Declaration cannot be viewed merely as a sudden and surprising action. The views vary, however, as regards the major *factors triggering the decision* to advocate a convergent system of study programmes and degrees in Europe (see Witte 2006). It seems to be justified, though, to argue that three factors have been frequently named.

- First, since the 1960s there have been debates in various European countries about the most desirable patterns of the higher education system, whereby a need was felt to *make relatively short study programmes*

*more attractive* in the wake of expansion of higher education.

- Secondly, the ERASMUS programme inaugurated by the European Commission in 1987 was viewed so much as a “success story” that it stimulated debates how *temporary student mobility within Europe* could be spread further.
- Thirdly, many politicians and other actors got concerned since about the mid-1990s that study in non-English-speaking European countries seemed to loose *attractiveness for students from other parts of the world*; the introduction of a bachelor-master structure of study programmes was considered to be a major vehicle to increase the attractiveness. Such views quickly spread notably in France and Germany. In Germany, for example, the Framework Act for Higher Education – a national law for the coordination of legislation in the individual states - was already revised early in 1998 in order to facilitate the establishment of stages of study programmes and degrees, before joint declarations were signed across Europe.

On the occasion of an anniversary of the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1998, the ministers in charge of higher education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom declared that they would establish a “harmonized” structure of programmes and degrees. As the signing of the so-called “*Sorbonne Declaration*” was criticized as an isolated attempt of a few European countries, but the concept as such found widespread support as a great leap forward, efforts were made to establish a broader basis for further action. In June 1999, the ministers of 29 European countries signed the so-called “*Bologna Declaration*” in Bologna (Italy), according to which a stage structure of programmes and degrees should be established and eventually a “European higher education area” should be implemented by the year 2010. Subsequent ministerial *follow-up conferences* for monitoring, specifying and stimulating this process were held in Prague (Czech Republic) in 2001, in Berlin (Germany) in 2003, in Bergen (Norway) in 2005, in London (United Kingdom) in 2007, in Leuven (Belgium) in 2009, this time jointly prepared by the governments of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, and eventually in Vienna (Austria) and Budapest (Hungary) in 2010. In the mean time, 47 countries have joined this cooperation.

The major supra-national actor of the now so-called “Bologna Process”, in contrast to that of the above named process to establish a European Research Area, is not the European Union; rather, the ministers of individual European countries jointly promote this process. Actually, the European Commission, the governmental body of the European Union, was caught by surprise in 1998, because the four ministers signing the Sorbonne Declaration advocated exactly what they had forbidden the European Commission to do in the past: to challenge the variety of higher education systems in Europe.

Actually, the basic assumptions triggering off the Bologna Process were not well founded statistically. First, proportion of the students all over the world studying abroad who opted for study in the non-English-speaking European countries have not really been on the decline, as it was often claimed (cf. Teichler 1999). Moreover, it is not certain whether measures of structural convergence were the most important ones to make higher education in Europe more attractive: The language issue, the scarcity of highly organized doctoral programmes or the deficiencies regarding individual academic and administrative support for the students in some European countries might have been more salient factors. But, clearly, beliefs are also facts: The belief spread quickly in Europe around the year 2000 that structural similarities of the European higher education systems would make them more attractive for persons from outside Europe.

Second, the Bologna Declaration pointed out that similar programmes and degrees in Europe will also serve the intra-European student mobility. But intra-European student mobility already has worked quite well beforehand in the framework of ERASMUS amidst varied programmes and degrees. It might work better, if programmes and degrees are similar, but one could conclude: European countries would not have taken the burden of revamping the programmes and degrees in Europe, if that was merely for a moderate increase of student-mobility within Europe.

### **The Bologna Reform Programme**

The Bologna Declaration, in its core, has emphasized an operational objective: the establishment of a *cycle system of study programmes and degrees* all over Europe: A first study programme leading a degree which is called Bachelor in the Anglo-Saxon World, and a second leading to a Master. Actually, the ministers involved even *never agreed on a common model as*

*regards length of the study programmes*. Three-year Bachelor and two-year Master programmes were established most frequently, and five years of study up a master is the most widespread model, but room for manoeuvre has remained for other options (see Reichert and Tauch, 2003, 2005).

Over the years, the Communiqués signed by the ministers in the follow-up conferences emphasize that *doctoral studies* should be viewed as the third stage of the Bologna model. However, no concrete agreements were reached as regards the character of such a third stage, status of the doctoral candidates or similar salient issues.

The Bologna Declaration also suggested *accompanying measures* to reinforce the possible impact of the structural convergence of higher education systems in the European countries. First, a *credit system* should be introduced everywhere in order to measure study achievements cumulatively and in order to have a common “currency” for decisions to recognize study achievements abroad upon return of temporarily mobile students. Second, a “*diploma supplement*” should be awarded to all students upon graduation in order to provide easily readable and internationally understandable information on the national higher education system, the study programme and the individual students’ achievements. Third, a close cooperation between the European countries was advocated in evaluation activities, in this context often called “*quality assurance*”.

This structural reform and the accompanying measures are called for in the Bologna Declaration as serving the strategic objective aim of *contributing to student mobility*. Actually, two aims are pronounced: To *increase the attractiveness of higher education in Europe for students from other parts of the world*, and to *facilitate intra-European mobility*. Without explicitly stating so, the Bologna Process aims primarily to increase the following modes of student mobility: (a) inbound mobility for the whole degree programmes from other parts of the world, and (b) temporary (between three months and a year) inbound and outbound mobility between the European countries (cf. Teichler 2009b; Wächter 2008).

It is also clear that the Bologna reform programme considers the cycle system of degrees as a virtue for the students’ options and for a better articulation between the provisions of the higher education system and the needs of society. *Short study programmes should be made more attractive*, and students should have more *flexibility in the course of their study career*, whereby study could

be more easily stretched over the life course (“lifelong learning”).

In the course of the years, the *Bologna agenda obviously has broadened* (see the overview in Alesi et al. 2005; Kehm, Huisman and Stensaker 2009; CHEPS, INCHER-Kassel and ECOTEC 2010). As the Bologna Process turned out to be a motor of change, many actors aim to widen the agenda either by suggesting the European governments to add new themes into the Communiqués of the follow-up conferences or, less officially, into the official conferences held under the auspices of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG, the coordination group between the ministerial conferences), or by just reinterpreting the Bologna discourse as including their preferred themes. For example, the European Commission published various papers in which they claimed the philosophy underlying the Lisbon Process is more or less identical to the philosophy underlying the Bologna Process (see European Commission 2010).

There is no doubt, however, that a second major theme of the Bologna Process emerged and grew over time in addition to the structural theme (the stage structure of study programmes and degrees): that of the *substance of the study programmes*, notably the major curricular thrusts as well as the relationships between study and subsequent graduate employment and work. “Qualifications frameworks” and “employability” became the most frequent terms referred to in order to underscore the relevance of this second major theme.

Initially, it was frequently pointed out that the Bologna Declaration calls only for a structural convergence thereby leaving the European variety of curricular approaches unchanged. There should be a “greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education” whereby the varied competences could be easily accepted as being on equal terms.

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 refers to the relationships between higher education and the world of work only once in a pronounced way: “The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market”. This formulation *calling for a professional relevance of the university Bachelor* reflects the concern that universities from countries, where only long study programmes have existed in the past, might shape the bachelor programmes in such a way that bachelors turning to the labour market will be handicapped because their degree will be similar to an interim certificate like the French “DEUG” or the German “Vor-Diplom” in the past; it also shows the awareness that the employers might have

to reconsider their recruitment strategies for accommodating the university Bachelor graduates.

The subsequent debates and activities in the Bologna Process went beyond this issue, as far as curricular approaches were concerned. When a stronger need was felt to disentangle the level of competences and knowledge strived for up to a Bachelor and up to a Master, the ministers approved the formulation of so-called “*qualifications frameworks*” in their communiqué of 2005 which might be formulated broadly for European higher education as a whole, within national settings and within disciplinary settings. For example, Bachelor graduates should be able to “apply their knowledge/understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach”, while Master graduates should be able to “apply their knowledge/understanding and problem solving abilities in new and unfamiliar environments within broader contexts”. The terminology also indicates that the educational discourse in higher education moved gradually from “knowledge” and “achievement” to “learning outcomes” and “competences” in the course of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Concurrently, a multitude of issues was addressed within or along the Bologna Process under the label “*employability*”. Some advocates of “employability” called for a subordination of the curricula under the presumed employers’ demands, others recommended a quantitative steering of higher education according to expected labour market developments. Again, others preferred more “learning to learn” and “key skills” to cope with labour market uncertainties, and others saw curricula as an opportunity to prepare students to change proactively their job roles. Again, others advocated the spread of knowledge and competences relevant on the search for employment and for fostering the ability to manage one’s own (professional, but not only professional) life. Thereby, the term “employability” misleadingly suggests that issues of employment (salary, pensions, stability of contracts etc.) are at stake, while the discourse actually concentrated on substantive matters of learning, competence and work (as possibly might be named “professional relevance”, see Teichler 2009a).

The debates and policies in the framework or in the context of the Bologna Process spread further beyond those themes. Joint activities of “quality assurance” extended beyond the initially envisaged objectives. Various themes were added to the list: Widened access to higher education and permeability between the vocational training system and higher education as well as the “social

dimension” of higher education, among others in terms of the financial conditions for study and the actual study conditions.

### **The General Results of Ten Years of the Bologna Process**

On the basis of various studies published around 2010 it is possible to paint a first picture of the general results of the Bologna Process. Even though occasionally views diverge and it is not yet possible to grasp all the consequences at this point in time, the following interim account might be appropriate (see the more extended account in Teichler 2011).

*Speed of implementation:* The operational objectives of the Bologna Process were implemented in an enormously varied speed in the various European countries. In some countries, the new degree structures and most of the accompanied measures were already implemented by 2002. In other countries, the process of implementation started early but lasted many years. In other countries, the first years were characterized by debates whether the new structures should be implemented at all, and only after a few years of discussion about the “if” of the reform the “how” became the focus of the debate. In other countries, finally, not much has happened even after a decade since the Bologna Declaration (cf. Alesi et al. 2005; Sursock and Smidt 2010).

*Extent of introduction of Bachelor-Master structure:* Surveys undertaken on behalf of the European University Association (see Sursock and Smidt 2010) suggest that a Bachelor-Master structure of study programmes and degrees was implemented by 2010 at most higher education institutions in the countries participating in the Bologna Process. According to the EUA university survey, 53% of higher education institutions in the European countries participating in the Bologna Process had *implemented a stage structure* – Bachelor, Master and possibly doctoral award – in 2003. The proportion has risen to 82% in 2007 and 95% in 2010.

It might be added here that the “accompanying measures” to the structural change seem to have been implemented to a similar extent. 96% of the institutions responding in the EUA survey 2010 that they have a *credit accumulation system* for all Bachelor and Master programmes. Thereby, 88% make use of the ECTS system (counting of 60 credits as a normal nominal work load for one academic year). Also, the *Diploma Supplement* is spreading quickly. While in the 2007 EUA survey 48% of the higher education institutions have

reported that they issue it to all graduating students, the respective rate was 66% in 2010. A further 14% of institutions reported in the latter survey that they issue the *Diploma Supplement* upon request.

The EUA survey results are reported here, even though only 15% of the institutions of higher education responded to the survey. Certainly, institutions are more likely to respond to such a survey if they actually implemented the changes addressed in the survey. Thus, the figures certainly exaggerate the actual extent of implementation. Yet, most experts agree in being convinced that the formal implementation of the Bologna mechanisms have moved very far.

*Variation by field of study:* However, the Bachelor-Master was not introduced to a similar extent across all fields of study. As one might expect, a Bachelor-Master structure remained a minority phenomenon according to the EUA 2010 survey in most medical fields (veterinary 16%, dentistry 21%, pharmacy 27%, medicine 28%, midwifery 36% and nursing 46%). There are other fields with a below average extent of implementation: architecture (46%), law (61%), teacher training (68%) and engineering (73%).

*Bachelor – a terminal or transitional degree:* The Bachelor at universities seems to function predominantly as an interim stage towards a Master degree. 85% of the representatives of universities responding to the 2010 EUA survey expect the majority not to go to the labour market directly. The respective proportion was 55% for other higher education institutions.

*Length of study programmes:* Although common goals and operational objectives were emphasized, the individual countries varied substantially in their interpretation of the goals and the actual operational activities. Even the most obvious possible measure of European coordination within the new system of study programme, namely a standardization of the length of the study programmes, has never been achieved. Actually, 18 countries consistently introduced 3-years Bachelor and 2-years Master programmes. Six countries have a 4-2 system, and four countries 4-years Bachelor programmes and Master programmes comprising one or 1 ½ years. The remaining countries have varied models (Eurydice 2010).

*Concurrent curricular reforms:* The majority of higher education institutions responding to the 2010 EUA survey claim that curricular reconsiderations have taken place along structural changes. Among those introducing a Bachelor-Master structure, 77% reported that curricular reconsiderations had been on the agenda in all departments.

*Thematic range of the Bologna Process:* As already pointed out, the thematic range of the Bologna Process widened substantially over time. As the Bologna Declaration obviously was successful in triggering intensive discussions and efforts to change higher education, efforts were frequently made to put additional issues into the Bologna agenda. Some observers consider this as steps towards a comprehensive reform of higher education in Europe, while others view this as a dilution of the Bologna reform programme.

*Curricular change:* In some countries, the introduction of the stage system of study programmes and degrees was accompanied by intensive activities of *reconsideration and curricula change*, while in other countries, operational changes were implemented with little curricular considerations. In the course of the ministerial follow-up conferences, increasing emphasis was placed on substantive matters of the new study programmes. This might be viewed as an indication of disappointment that the initial aim to strive for structural convergence of the higher education system across Europe was a less powerful instrument for an overall reform than initially envisaged. In contrast, one could have assumed from the outset that a structural reform has to be accompanied by major curricular reforms. Most observers believe that the curricular debates on a stronger awareness of the results of study (“competences”, “learning outcomes”), on feedback of experiences for the improvement of teaching and learning (“quality assurance”), on the levels of competences to be reached at the end of the various stages of study (“qualifications frameworks”), on the links between study and subsequent employment and work (“employability”) and on the role of higher education programmes in the life course (“lifelong learning”) indicate the needs for improvements as well as actually successful changes. But nobody seriously dares to assess the extent to which changes in those directions actually have taken place. The actual aims of such reforms remain controversial. And it has remained open how far a paradigmatic shift towards a curricular convergence across Europe has taken place in recent years or how far the initial aim of preserving curricular variety amidst structural convergence is upheld.

*Involvement of actors:* Many assessments of the Bologna Process point out that the *governmental actors* have been the strongest advocates of the key reforms from the outset. Leaders of higher education institutions have followed soon, while many *academics* continued to consider the Bologna programme as an undesirable imposition from

“above”. And protests by *students* were by no means infrequent. There were widespread critiques that a university Bachelor was not a sufficient level of academically based study, and many university teachers and students practically view the university Bachelor as a transition stage to the Master. The learning processes are often viewed as over-regulated in the short Bachelor programmes strongly shaped by frequent examinations as a consequence of implementation of a credit system. There are concerns that the strong drive towards “employability” undermines academic quality as well as critical and innovative reasoning of students.

*Extent of general acceptance:* As the debates about the strengths and weaknesses of the Bologna agenda are highly emotional and as we note a magnitude of “eulogies and protests” (Reichert 2010), it is very difficult to establish *how far the major reform trend actually is accepted or refuted*. In a survey of academic staff in 31 European countries conducted in 2007, about one third agreed to the statement “It would have been better if the old single-tier system (without a split in Bachelor and Master) was kept” (Gallup Organization 2007). Disapproval of the Bachelor-Master system was most frequent on the part of academics in Germany (53%), followed by those in Estonia (46%), Hungary and Italy (42% each).

*Protracted process towards a European Higher Education Area:* The Bologna Declaration of 1999 called for the realization of a “European Higher Education Area” by 2010. Actors and observers agree that major changes have taken place since 1999, but that a comprehensive reform has not taken place up to 2010. The ministers of the European countries involved in the Bologna Process indicated in their Communiqués of 2009 and 2010 that they see a further decade of the Bologna Process shaped by further steps of implementation of the initial goals, necessary revisions and in some respects efforts to reach even more ambitious goals.

*Heterogeneous national approaches of “Bologna”:* Finally, it became clear that higher education in the various European countries, in spite of such efforts for increased similarity and cooperation, has remained quite heterogeneous. This is clearly mirrored in enormous differences, as far as the length of study programmes and the curricular approaches are concerned. But it also affects the frequency of student mobility across Europe – i.e. the prime target area of the Bologna reforms.

## The Bologna Process and Student Mobility

As the Bologna Declaration named the enhancement of student mobility as the major strategic objective of the reform programme, one could have expected that efforts were made to set up a system of statistics and surveys suitable to monitor the actual quantitative development of student mobility. In practice, however, *the information base for measuring trends of student mobility has remained fairly weak*. In a study on the available statistical basis undertaken in 2006 by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), the following problems were stressed (Kelo, Teichler and Wächter 2006):

- International statistics traditionally have provided information about *foreign students and study abroad*; these data are *weak approximations for student mobility* because a substantial proportion of foreign students in various European countries have not been mobile for the purpose of study, but rather had already lived and been educated in the country of study. In reverse, some students have lived and learned in another country prior to study and moved to the country of their citizenship for the purpose of study.
- Many countries *include temporarily mobile students* – i.e. the most frequent mode of intra-European student mobility – *only partially or not at all* in their student statistics. Some countries even count temporarily outbound mobile students as home students during the study period abroad.
- The available international statistics *do not offer any distinction between “degree-mobile” or “diploma-mobile” students*, i.e. those intending to study a whole study programme abroad, and *“temporarily mobile”, “short-term mobile” or “credit-mobile” students*, i.e. those intending to study abroad for one semester or for a somewhat longer time-span within a study programme.
- There is *no distinction* made in the international statistics according to citizenship or mobility *according to Bachelor and Master programmes*.
- There are no *statistics and surveys* across Europe suitable to establish the *event of student mobility*, i.e. *how many students have studied abroad during the course study* – either the whole study programme or at least some period during the course of study.

Therefore, we can only repeat the widespread practice in Europe to report the results of statistical analyses on foreign students as an approximation of student mobility. For a limited number of countries we can add examples of more appropriate data.

The recent study “The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe: Key Indicators on the Social Dimension and Mobility” (EUROSTAT and EUROSTUDENT 2009) presented data on the change of foreign students and study abroad in Europe in recent years based on statistics jointly collected by UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT. According to this study, the percentage of foreign students among all foreign students in the 27 EU countries increased from 5.4% in 2000 to 7.5% in 2006.

According to a new, not yet published study of the Academic Cooperation Association on 32 European countries (ERASMUS-eligible countries and Switzerland),

- the number of foreign students increased from about 827,000 foreign students in these 32 European countries in 1999 (5.4% of all students) to about 1,118,000 (5.8%) in 2003 and eventually 1,516,000 (7.0%) in 2007; thus, the overall increase over eight years is more than 80% in absolute figures and about 30% in relative figures;
- the rate of foreign students in these countries being *citizens of other European countries* increased only from 3.0% in 1999 to 3.3% in 2007, whereas the rate of *foreign students from outside Europe* (and unknown nationality) increased during that period from 2.4% to 3.7% (Teichler, Ferencz and Wächter 2011).

The total absolute growth of foreign students over the period of eight years is quite impressive: The overall increase of foreign students in Europe during this period is clearly higher than 53% overall growth of the total number of foreign students in all countries of the world (see UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2009). The available statistics reinforce the view that *higher education in Europe has become more attractive for students from other parts of the world wishing to study abroad*.

According to another study comprising data for all 46 countries having joined the Bologna Process until 2009, the percentage of foreign students in the EHEA has increased from 3.5% in 1999 to 4.6% in

2007; the substantially lower figures than those reported in the previously named studies are primarily due to the fact that Russia – characterized by a large absolute number of students and a low percentage of foreign students – is included in the latter data (CHEPS, INCHER-Kassel and ECOTEC 2010).

The proportion of foreign students among all students *varies dramatically among European countries*. In disregarding the special conditions of a few very small countries (Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Cyprus etc.), we note rates of 15-20% in Switzerland, United Kingdom and Austria in 2007 as well as rates slightly above 10% in Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden; in contrast, less than 1% foreign students are reported, for example, for Poland, Slovakia and Turkey.

According to the same source, the rate of *students studying abroad* of the tertiary enrolment of the home country decreased from 3.3% in 1999 to 2.8% in 2007 in Western Europe. The respective rate in Central and Eastern Europe remained constant during that period at 1.7%. Actually, the UNESCO statistics suggest that about 80% of European students studying abroad went to other European countries and only about 20% went to other continents.

Information, how much data on *genuine student mobility* differ from data on foreign students, is provided for 2003 by the above named ACA study (Kelo, Teichler and Wächter 2006):

- In Switzerland, 14.1% of all students were foreign mobile students and 2.0% home country mobile students, thus adding to 16.1% all mobile students, while 5.4% of the students were foreign non-mobile students (the international statistics show 19.5% foreign students).
- In Austria, 10.6% of all students were foreign mobile students and 1.3% home country mobile students, thus adding to 11.9% all mobile students, while 2.7% of the students were foreign non-mobile students and 13.3% altogether foreign students.
- Finally, in Spain, only 1.7% of all students were foreign mobile students and only 0.1% home country mobile students, thus adding to 1.8% all mobile students, while 1.0% of the students were foreign non-mobile students and 2.7% altogether foreign students.

For these three countries, information is available as well regarding 2007. Accordingly, the proportion of foreign mobile students has increased

within four years from 1.7% to 2.7% in Spain, from 10.6% to 11.7% in Austria and from 14.1% to 14.3% in Switzerland (Teichler, Ferencz and Wächter 2011).

Information on the development of *foreign mobile students* since the Bologna Declaration is only available for a few European countries. In Germany, foreign mobile students (“Bildungsausländer”) comprised 6.0% in 1999; increased to 9.5% in the years 2005 to 2007 and thereafter slightly decreased to 8.9%.

In spite of the weaknesses of the available data, one can infer that of the two strategic aims of the Bologna Declaration as regards student mobility, one was successful: students from other parts of the world came to Europe in larger numbers than one could have expected from trends of worldwide mobility increase anyway. The other was not successful: Student mobility within Europe seems to have increased during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century only at a low pace – obviously lower than in the 1990s.

When the ministers in charge of higher education formulated in the Leuven Communiqué in 2009 that an intra-European student mobility quota of 20% should be reached by 2020, they did not provide any definition of the quota. But obviously, they envisaged that in the minority of cases students would spend the whole programme and in the majority of cases one or more short periods of one or two semesters during the overall course of their study.

The *event of having studied in another country* can be measured with the help of two different approaches. First, the frequency of temporary study in another country can be established with the help of surveys of students who are already close to graduation or with the help of graduate surveys undertaken soon after graduation. Second, the frequency of “diploma mobility”, i.e. mobility for a whole study programme, can be established with the help of educational statistics collected internationally by UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat.

As regards the former approach, the “Eurostudent” studies are the best possible source on the part of student survey. Unfortunately, however, the most recent study unfortunately provides only events prior study abroad for all students (Orr 2008); in contrast, the predecessor studies in Germany undertaken by the Hochschul Informations System GmbH have informed about study periods or other study-related activities for students shortly prior to graduation.

A comparative graduate survey – the so-called REFLEX survey – covered graduates of the academic year 1999/2000 from more than a dozen

European countries (see Schomburg and Teichler 2008. see also Allen and van der Velden 2011). A glance at the findings with respect to three countries might suffice to show the complexity of international experience. Accordingly, 16% of the graduates from higher education institutions in France, 23% in the United Kingdom and 8% in Germany had a *migration background* (i.e. they themselves or their parents came from another country), among them 12%, 3% and 6% were born abroad. 36% of the graduates from higher education institution in France, 30% in Germany and 19% in the UK had either studied or had other study-related experiences (internships, summer courses, language schools, etc.). In the case of Germany, further information shows that about 15% have studied abroad and that about 15% had only other study-related experiences. Moreover, 21% of the graduates from higher education institutions each in France and the UK and 16% in Germany were internationally mobile during the first five years after graduation. Among them, 4%, 7% and 3% were employed abroad five years after graduation. In combining the above named experiences we conclude that 50% of the 2000 graduates from higher education institutions in France had some “life-course international experience” up to five years after graduation. The corresponding figures for graduates in the UK were 46% and for graduates in Germany 40%.

It is difficult to establish whether the event of temporary mobility during the course of study has increased in the Bologna Process. First, regular representative graduate surveys are undertaken only a few European countries. Second, the implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure was relatively slow in various countries; therefore, only a small number of graduates have passed through both the Bachelor and Master programmes at the time when the most recent graduate surveys were undertaken. Third, most surveys actually undertaken do not combine the event of mobility during both the bachelor and the master programmes for those continuing study beyond the bachelor degree.

According to an overview on recent graduate surveys in ten European countries, clearly more than 20% of students in the Netherlands and in Austria spend at least a semester of study in another country (see Schomburg and Teichler 2011). In Germany, 16% of the graduates from bachelor programmes, 17% from master programmes and 19% of single-cycle programmes at universities have studied at least a semester in another country; the corresponding figures for graduates from Fachhochschulen (i.e. non-

university higher education) are 14%, 9% and again 9%. By taking into account the frequencies of the various degrees as well transition rates from Bachelor to Master programmes, we estimate that 17-18% of graduates from German institutions of higher education have studied abroad during the course of study; other sources suggest that 2-3% of German students study the whole period abroad. Thus, the figures suggest that already about 20% of German students study abroad during the course of study in one way or other – as many as are expected to do on average in Europe by the year 2020. But there are contrasting cases reported in this overview: Only 4% of British bachelor graduates had studied abroad as well as 2% of Bachelor graduates and 3% of Master graduates from Poland.

### The Experiences and Prospects of Mobile Students

The most obvious finding of systematic information available on international mobility of students (cf. the overviews in Teekens and de Wit 2007; Vincent-Lancrin 2010) is that the *mobile students cannot be viewed to be a single group*. Certainly, international offices at higher education institutions might be in charge of all mobile students, and all internationally mobile students experience the opportunities and risks of being confronted by living conditions and an educational environment different from what they have experienced beforehand. But from the European perspective, certainly three different groups of mobile students have to be disentangled:

- Students *from low-income and middle-income countries* moving mostly for degree-study to an economically advanced country and a matured higher education system.
- Students *from economically advanced countries moving for degree study* to another economically advanced country.
- *Temporarily mobile students within economically advanced countries*.

“Vertical mobility”, i.e. mobility from economically and academically less favoured countries to economically and academically more favoured countries, is undertaken mostly for the whole degree programmes. It more widely spreads in fields of study with a universalistic knowledge base and/or in fields of study which as a rule lead to a relatively higher income for graduates. Many of the mobile students are academically ambitious

and/or come from relatively wealthy families in their home country. In order to succeed in study abroad, they have to adapt to a high degree to the academic and cultural environment of the host country.

There are substantial proportions of students who actually face major problems as far as academic achievement is concerned; there are countries and institutions where higher drop-out rates of foreign students are reported than those of home country students, and there are countries and institutions, where students from academically and economically advanced levels are awarded a degree with some grace which low achievers among home country students could not expect. Also, there are success stories, and many vertically mobile students aim to get employed in the host country of study or in another economically advanced country; this tends to be appreciated by the students and graduates themselves, but is often deplored by their country of origin as “brain drain”.

Least is known about the second group, the *degree-mobile students within economically advanced countries*, but all available information suggests that they are quite heterogeneous. Among doctoral and master students, the percentage of these students is higher. In many instances, students go to another country because they are attracted by the academic reputation of the host institution. There is not infrequent degree mobility between neighbour countries. Some students study abroad because they did not succeed to be admitted in the field of study or the institution they wanted to enrol. As a consequence, hardly any generalisation can be made about the challenges of study abroad and the eventual impact.

In contrast, quite a number of studies have been undertaken about *temporary mobility within Europe*. Many of these studies address the students being mobile within the *ERASMUS programme*, i.e. the world-largest programme for the support of temporary student mobility inaugurated in 1987 which recently helps almost 200,000 European students annually to spend one or two semesters at a higher education institution in another European country. Thereby students can expect as a rule that their study achievements abroad will be recognized by their home institution upon return (see Teichler 2002; CHEPS, INCHER and ECOTEC 2008; Janson, Schomburg and Teichler 2009; Bürger and Lanzendorf 2010).

Obviously, temporary mobile students in Europe outside the ERASMUS programmes are academically somewhat better prepared and report a slightly more impressive impact of study abroad period on average than ERASMUS students; this

finding is not surprising, because the ERASMUS programme was established as a programme mobilizing those who would not go without such an additional stimulus. The evaluation studies show that academic and cultural learning during the study period is closely intertwined. The majority of the ERASMUS students believe that their academic progress abroad was higher than that expected during a corresponding period of study at home, even though many students experience upon return not a complete recognition of their study achievements abroad; available information suggest that academic learning abroad in the framework of ERASMUS on average is not superior in substance matter in general, but in the stimulation of reflection and of comparative thinking.

ERASMUS students by no means consider the study abroad period as not posing any problems. According to most surveys undertaken, one fifth or more of former ERASMUS students report administrative problems in the host country, accommodation problems as well as financial constraints. Academic problems such as following the lectures in a foreign language, getting along with the teaching and learning styles abroad and coping with the academic challenges at the host institution, are named less frequently.

Former *ERASMUS students from Western European countries* view themselves as slightly superior to other students and are similarly viewed by their teachers and by employers as far as specific academic knowledge and general study-related competences are concerned. They seem to have slightly better chances to get employed easily but do not differ substantially as far as their position and income are concerned from non-mobile students. However, they clearly feel superior in competences directly linked to international experiences, e.g. foreign language proficiency as well as knowledge and understanding of various countries and comparative thinking, they clearly take more often job assignments with clear international elements; last but not least they by far more often are internationally mobile on their job than non-mobile students.

It should be added that ERASMUS seems to have a clearly higher value for *students from Central and Eastern European countries* than those from Western European countries. The former report higher achievements and competences as compared to non-mobile students and rate the professional impact of temporary study abroad clearly more positively than their fellow students from Western European countries.

In comparing the statements of former ERASMUS students in recent years to those of the earlier cohorts of the ERASMUS programme we note that *the “value-added” of temporary study abroad seems to decrease over time*. A comparison of surveys on ERASMUS 1988/89 students surveyed five years later, graduates 1994/95 surveyed four years later who had been mobile with ERASMUS support, and ERASMUS 2000/01 students surveyed five years later (Janson, Schomburg and Teichler 2009) shows

- A decline in the perception that the ERASMUS experience had a positive influence on employment and work. The perception of a positive influence of ERASMUS in obtaining a first job declined from 71% to 66% and eventually 54%. A positive influence on type of work task involved was reported by 49%, 44% and eventually 39% and a positive influence on the income level by 25%, 22% and finally 16%.
- The following visible international work tasks were reported: “Using the language of the host country orally” declined from 47% to 42% and 38%, “using the language of the host country in reading and writing” similarly from 47% to 40% and 38%, “using first-hand professional knowledge of the host country” from 30% and 25% and again 25%, “using first-hand knowledge of the country culture or society” from 30%, after an increase to 32%, to 25%, and “professional travel to the host country” from 17%, after 18% in the second survey, to eventually 14%.

These findings seem to reflect – so the interpretation by the authors of the comparison of the three studies - a declining exceptionality of temporary study abroad. The study and living environment becomes more international for students living in Europe, even if they do not study abroad.

### **Student Mobility and the Bologna Process – a Provisional Account**

We note a worldwide trend toward increasing international student mobility. Notably the number of students from low income and middle income countries opting for study in a foreign country, notably an economically advanced country, keeps growing. This is partly triggered by substantial expansion of student enrolment in low income and middle income countries, but the rate of study

abroad grows slightly as well. The percentage of foreign students among all students in the European countries has increased in recent years as a consequence of such a “push effect” of increasing numbers of study abroad students from outside Europe, but the growth of students from outside Europe has to be even higher. Thus, the Bologna Process has made study in European countries *more attractive for students from outside Europe*. In various European countries, efforts have been made to facilitate mobility through improved services, an increased number of study programmes in the English language, and a stronger international focus of the study programmes as such. Yet, we do not know how far these changes have gone, and most experts believe that further improvements are needed to help students from outside Europe coping with all the challenges they face as foreign students in Europe.

With a few exceptions, higher education policies advocate both increasing inward and outward mobility whereby the latter students mostly head for other economically advanced countries and in this framework most to other European countries. Intra-European temporary student mobility has substantially increased in the 1990s. Notably, the ERASMUS programme established in 1987 was viewed as a “success story”; many students came to the conclusion that “learning from contrasts” within Europe is highly valuable. The available data are too poor to establish clearly whether intra-European temporary student mobility has grown in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century more or less in the same pace as in the 1990s or whether the growth of intra-European temporary student mobility has and increased at a higher pace or even slowed down in the recent past. This is due to the poor state of statistics on temporary student mobility. In any event, there is *no evidence that the Bologna Process has worked as an accelerator of intra-European student mobility*.

Obviously, temporary study abroad still is viewed as an exceptional period of rich experience which might be as well helpful for career enhancement in the various countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as some South-Eastern European countries. It will take time until barriers fade away, and certainly many of these students need help in order to cope with the changing study environment abroad.

For students from Western European countries, temporary study abroad became *a normal option within easy reach*. It might continue to grow in the future because learning from contrast, as often experienced in the ERASMUS programme, and it might continue to be viewed as valuable. But it is

by no means sure whether the trend of the past years will persist. If the curricular changes in the various European countries will move towards a European “convergence”, the increasing similarity across Europe and might reduce the value of temporary study abroad as “learning from contrasts”. Moreover, international learning is bound to lose its exceptionality further as a consequence of a general internationalisation of the daily life and as a consequence of increasing “internationalisation at home” of the study provisions.

The aim recently formulated within the Bologna Process that 20% of students should spend all or a period of study in a foreign country, seems to be already realized in some Western European countries and is likely to be achieved in some other countries in the near future. However, it *might be worth – rather than only relying on a trend extrapolation – to consider new ways of making study within another European country an even more worthwhile experience*. We could imagine the emergence of new concepts of curricular innovation aimed at making study in another European country an even more valuable experience than it has been in the past.

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### Author Biography

**Ulrich Teichler** is a Professor at the International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel), University of Kassel (Germany), since 1978, and former director for 16 years. Born in 1942; diploma and doctoral dissertation in sociology; researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Educational Research, Berlin. Extended research periods in Japan, the Netherlands, and the U.S.; part-time or visiting professor at Northwestern University, College of Europe, Hiroshima University, and Open University, UK. Research on higher education and the world of work, comparison of higher education systems, and international mobility; more than 1,000 publications. Member of the International Academy of Education and the Academia Europaea, former chairman of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers, former president and distinguished member of EAIR; Comenius Prize of UNESCO; Dr. h.c. of the University of Turku.