

# National Report Malta

## Present situation

The Ministers responsible for Higher Education in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy, during the Sorbonne Declaration committed themselves to encourage a common frame of reference for Higher Education in order to improve external recognition of degrees and facilitate student mobility. The joint declaration on "The European Higher Education Area" adopted by 29 European Education Ministers and Head of Institutes, in Bologna on 19 June 1999 lists the objectives, which the European Education Ministers consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of Higher Education and to promote the European system of Higher Education worldwide. The first Bologna follow-up conference was held in Prague. The goals laid down in the Bologna Declaration had been widely accepted and used as a base for the development of Higher Education by most signatories as well as by universities and other Higher Education institutions.

The Prague Communiqué reaffirmed the goals of the Bologna Declaration and emphasized the importance of mobility, quality assurance and accreditation as well as the significance of the European dimension in Education, of lifelong learning and involvement of universities and students in the creation of the European Higher Education Area. The conference in Prague has also led to a reorganization of the groups and the procedure of preparing Ministerial meetings of the Bologna process. The Bologna Follow-up Group is now composed of representatives of all signatories. The EU Presidency, at the time chairs it. The European Commission is now a full member of the Group. This is to ensure better interlinkage with Education activities in EU bodies. The European Commission participates in Group meetings as a full member; in addition, there are four observers (EUA, ESIB, EURASHE and Council of Europe).

Being one of the twenty-nine countries that have signed up to the Bologna Declaration in June 1999, Malta, through the University of Malta embarked on a binding commitment to reform its Educational system with the aim of facilitating

mobility and recognition of qualifications. Since then major improvements have been achieved by the University of Malta in several aspects, which lacked compatibility with other European Universities.

The Bologna declaration is a key statement on Higher Education policy and reform in Europe. It is an evolving process driven by the participating countries but also involving the European Commission, the CRE – Association of European Universities, the Confederation of Rectors Conferences of the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Student Platform and the EURASHE as partners in the follow-up process, where Malta is represented in all of these areas.

The significance of the Bologna Declaration to Malta is particularly relevant to the recognition of qualifications within an enlarged Europe. There has been a concern for the ‘adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees’ amongst European Institutions. In this context, the implementation of the Diploma Supplement in our system through which all qualifications, such as degrees, diplomas, certificates etc. can be recognised and compared with much more ease is of fundamental importance. In today’s era of globalisation, such recognition will also play an important role in facilitating employability in all participating countries due to the greater degree of transparency in academic recognition resulting from this system.

Yet the Bologna process encompasses a number of aims not just the above of which, to establish a system consisting of two main cycles, namely the undergraduate and graduate, eliminate any obstacles that hinder student and staff mobility amongst European Universities, the European Credit Transfer System and other aims that ensure the creation of a European Higher Education Area.

The Bologna Declaration is an evolving process – indeed, various follow-up meetings are held to ensure continuous development. The next meeting, which is to be held in Berlin in 2003, will be especially fundamental in evaluating the progress achieved to date, as well in establishing new short-term priorities and milestones in a collective effort to obtain yet a Higher level of success in Educational reform. The Berlin Conference will also be instrumental in reviewing both institutional and geographical horizons for the European Higher Education Area.

The fact that the Bologna Declaration is the key to successful Educational reform has long been recognised by the University of Malta. Through the commitment that it is constantly showing towards the Bologna Declaration, it is evident that Malta currently is an active participant, a healthy partner and an influential figure in the building of the European Higher Education area. Indeed, Malta will strive to continue to be both beneficiary and contributor to the development of Higher Education in Europe in the forthcoming years.

## Action points

The result of the Bologna Declaration and Prague Communiqué were nine goals or courses of action of which, Ministers and head of institutions have to work in the attempt to create an open European Higher Education area. A framework that is expected to enable close cooperation between Higher Education institutions, facilitate student and staff mobility and increase both the competitiveness of Europeans in the world labour market and the attractiveness of European Higher Education in the world. The nine goals are not given equal emphasis in the implementation process.

In November 2001, DG Education and Culture released a working document called “From Prague to Berlin, the EU Contribution”. The paper outlined 9 measures the commission would take in order to bring the Bologna process further covering 6 of the original 9 goals.

The Report will take the following format, first I will outline which 6 goals of the 9 did the commission emphasise on and briefly outline the position Malta is or will be in achieving these goals or targets.

### **Action line 1: Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees**

- 1. A wide-scale introduction of the Diploma Supplement, increasing substantially the understanding and recognition of degrees at all levels. Synergies with similar documents in vocational training will be sought.*

The University of Malta does not yet have the capacity to do this yet. The University of Malta has from this academic year (2002/2003) started to introduce a new computerised system that will put the whole university in one database. The new software system, which was purchased, is not tailor made for the University of Malta, but a re-design of a system that is used by some one hundred Universities in Great Britain. Unfortunately such system does not include a diploma supplement, and has not yet been developed, but once that the database is ready and such an ancillary to

the software developed the University of Malta will be in a position to do the above. Currently transcripts display a limit amount of information on value of credits etc. but not a diploma supplement, which should contain such things as course information and other.

### **Action line 3: Establishment of a system of credits**

2. *A broad pilot scheme to test, building on the ECTS experience, a European Credit Accumulation System for Lifelong learning, enabling citizens to accumulate credits gained through formal, non-formal and in-formal learning (a new Joint Action as a follow-up to the exploratory projects starting this autumn).*

Ministers emphasised that for greater flexibility in learning and qualification processes the adoption of common cornerstones qualifications, supported by a credit system such as the ECTS or one that is ECTS-compatible, providing both transferability and accumulation function is necessary. Together with mutually recognised quality assurance systems such arrangements will facilitate students' access to the European Labour market and enhance the compatibility, attractiveness and competitiveness of European Higher Education. The generalised use of a credit system will foster progress in this direction, the idea is that credits gained while study abroad are recognised by the student's home university and count towards his or her degree.

The university of Malta has had a credit system since the 70's, which was based on, workload, and since the ECTS has the same basis, thus it is safe to say that the basis for implementing ECTS was already in existence within the University structure. The ECTS system was firstly introduced exclusively to be able to participate in Erasmus.

In June 2002 the senate of The University decided that as at October 2003 all credits would be assessed in ECTS terms a legal notice was issued in order for this to have a legal force. From next scholastic year 2003/2004 all University credits will be

expressed in all ECTS Terms permanently. The University of Malta did conform to this aspect of the Bologna Declaration.

The only exceptions are two courses because due to the nature of their work it was difficult to do this. Malta is not the exception to this, since other European Universities have found difficulty in expressing courses such as Medical Doctorial in ECTS terms.

#### **Action line 4: Promotion of mobility**

3. *The Socrates-Erasmus Student Charter. A one page leaflet or card stating clearly the rights and obligations of mobile students (no tuition fees, full academic recognition etc.). To be launched by the Commissioner at the occasion of the celebration of the one-millionth Erasmus student in the course of the academic year 2002-2003.*
4. *The creation of models of European Virtual Universities, in order to offer citizens access to a Europe-wide course offer and provide incentives to combine physical and virtual mobility.*

The Socrates-Erasmus Student Charter is being fully implemented by the Socrates Office of the University of Malta. As outlined by the measures of the Bologna Process, this 'could be implemented as from the coming academic year 2003-2004'. As from September 2003, the Socrates Office will be providing all outgoing students with a card stating clearly the rights and obligations of mobile students.

The University of Malta provides its staff and students with online information regarding its facilities and Institutes, Courses, Opportunities to study abroad, ongoing research and publications etc. The site also provides students with interactive support services and links to the European Unit's and Socrates' Office website. Although the University has invested heavily in proving this online facility, at present the website does not cater for virtual mobility though the offering of online courses and tuition.

As part of its effort to promote mobility the University has allocated a healthy amount of financial and human resources towards the encouragement of its researchers to participate in the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission. In a move to assist the integration of its researchers into the European Research Area, the European Unit of the University of Malta participates regularly in international training seminars to be able to offer assistance and guidance to Maltese students and researchers in their quest to participate in EU-funded projects.

Malta's decision to become associated to the EU's research and innovation programme, the Fifth Framework Programme (FP5), in 2001, was driven by an awareness of the need to integrate more closely with the European research community and thereby the global research community.

Today, the University of Malta is a broad-based Educational institution which has ten faculties: Architecture & Civil Engineering; Arts; Dental Surgery; Economics, Management & Accountancy; Education; Engineering; Laws; Medicine & Surgery; Science; Theology. There are also several institutes which cater, in an interdisciplinary way, for special interest areas. Its academic staff, who number approximately 550, participate regularly in both local and international research projects. Many of them have taken part or are, at present, participating in FP5 projects. Resources in research and Education are the most important growth-stimulating instruments today. In the context of EU enlargement, they are one of the most important ways in which societies and regions can be connected.

On Friday the 28th of February, the European Unit of the University of Malta in collaboration with the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST), and the Malta Federation Of Industry (FOI), organised a one-day 'Marie Curie Launching Seminar'.

Known collectively as the Marie Curie Actions, the EU's human resources and mobility activities are a major step forward in improving Europe's attractiveness and research performance. They offer a unique way for researchers of all ages and levels of experience regardless of nationality, to boost their career prospects, develop cutting-edge research skills and experience life in another country. The 'Marie Curie

Intra-European Fellowships' for instance, will allow the most promising researchers from EU and Candidate Countries to undertake training through research in the European organisations most appropriate to their individual needs. The researcher in collaboration will freely choose the topic with the host, with a view to completing or diversifying his/her expertise.

As was expected from the high demand of Early Stage Researchers (pre-doctorial researchers) to attend this seminar, a particular enthusiasm and inquisitive interest was shown from these participants. Through participating in the 'Marie Curie Host Fellowship for Early Stage Training', local researchers will be offered the freedom of benefiting from world-class training opportunities outside of Malta. Researchers anticipating reading for a PHD will be able to request funding to be able to do so. This should in no way be regarded as a loss of local talents towards the foreign community but on the contrary, as an investment by our European counterparts in our local human resources because of their belief in our ability to compete internationally and contribute towards the welfare of the Maltese and European society.

In one of a number of addresses that were made to the participants, Prof. Charles J. Farrugia, Pro Rector, University of Malta pointed out the important role research plays within universities. It is not only a means of attracting and motivating high quality staff, but it also offers valuable support to teaching. Since Malta's application was reactivated, Prof Farrugia noted that, 'public policy now recognises the priority of developing a knowledge-based economy, in which the development of ideas and the commercialisation of research are core activities, not optional extras.'

### **Action line 5: Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance**

- 5. A special action to promote a "quality culture" within universities, "bottom-up", in cooperation with the European University Association. This pilot scheme would help universities to introduce internal quality assurance mechanisms, improve their quality levels and being better prepared for external evaluations.*

6. *A Pilot Scheme on European Higher Education Quality Evaluation in order to experience what European transnational evaluation would mean on a voluntary basis, covering regulated professions (such as medical doctors) and non-regulated professions (such as business managers).*

The UoM received official acknowledgement from the European Commission, of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) recommendations and plans for future action. The Commission stated that the Maltese recommendations reflect closely the same principles identified in the Council Recommendation. Moreover, the structure in place for quality assurance at Committee level at the UoM was highly praised.

To succeed in its mission for quality Education, the UoM has adopted an approach characterised by a self-critical attitude towards its procedures. External evaluation complements internal procedures. The QAC's aims to bring about a culture change in students' and staff's thinking about quality Education. The Committee strives to work steadily but unobtrusively since its members believe that positive change cannot be imposed from above. It has to evolve from the grass roots. Such a process takes time, and the beneficial outcomes are not always readily apparent. The QAC fully acknowledges that quality services at UoM have not come into being with the formal creation of the Committee: many academics and administrators have been providing quality services for decades. It also recognises that other University committees promote 'quality' in the areas that fall within their responsibility.

During its first two years, the QAC worked on a number of initiatives. It launched the study-unit feedback forms and the campus suggestion scheme. It also set the groundwork for future initiatives.

These took tangible form during the following years as:

- § QAC mission statement
- § UoM mission statement and goals
- § UoM committee and organisational structure
- § Job descriptions for academic and non-academic posts

- § Criteria for promotion of academic staff
- § Terms of reference for external examiners
- § Pedagogical courses for academic staff (with AWRFC)
- § Courses for non-academic staff (with NAWRFC)
- § Pre-launch data for new courses
- § Improvement of the teaching environment
- § Research on effectiveness of study-unit feedback forms

## **Action line 6: Promotion of the European dimension in Higher Education**

7. *Define and support European Masters and Doctoral courses. Well-defined European degrees can contribute to the quality and visibility of European Higher Education. The Commission would support the development and launch of a series of new European Masters and joint Doctoral courses, the latter together with DG RTD support. A pilot project will test the running of "European Masters" and Doctoral courses in the academic year 2002-2003.*

The University of Malta coordinates EMPEE: The European Masters Programme in Environmental Education, which has been awarded with a development grant for the academic year 2002/3.

The application titled E-Maps: The European Masters in Performer Studies has just been accepted for funding for the contractual period 2003-2005.

## **Action line 9: Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area**

8. *A Data-base (Portal) on job and learning opportunities set up together with DG MPL, would help citizens find their way in the European Education offer.*

9. *Other measures will be identified in the Action Plan following the "Communication to the European parliament and the Council on strengthening cooperation with third countries in the field of Higher Education countries". Also DG EAC and DG RTD will join efforts to create synergies between the "European Area for Higher Education" and the "European Research Area".*

While affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, we engage in co-ordinating our policies to reach in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the third millennium, the following objectives, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of Higher Education and to promote the European system of Higher Education world-wide:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European Higher Education system.
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.
- Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-Higher Education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned.
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:

- · for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
- · for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in Higher Education, particularly with regards to curricular development, interinstitutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research. Through the University's efforts to participate in European Framework Programmes, the University is already experiencing the benefits of EU-funding for research mobility.