

Speech  
by Dirk Schüller  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the 19th century, German universities - and in particular the Humboldt University, which was founded in 1810 - were among the models for the establishment and development of university systems in numerous other countries around the world.

However, the attraction of German institutions of higher education on foreign students and scientists declined considerably in the course of the 20th century. At the beginning of the 1990s, we realized that even the former showcase disciplines of German higher education, such as the engineering sciences, were finding it increasingly difficult to attract highly talented foreign students to study in Germany.

One reason for this were the language problems which have to be tackled when studying in Germany - in contrast to courses of study in an English-speaking country.

But there was also another important reason: The single-cycle structure of study courses in Germany was not compatible with the requirements of the foreign students, many of whom already had a bachelor's degree.

Language problems and the need to get used to the unregimented - but also less structured – study courses at German institutions of higher education often meant that it took the foreign student several years to gain a German diploma.

And here lies the second problem. According to German law, the diploma is an initial degree which qualifies a graduate to enter a profession. But anyone who already has a bachelor's degree is looking for a second degree, a master's degree.

The analysis of this situation in the mid-90s caused experts in Germany to recognize the need for a two-cycle system, tailored towards students from abroad, in addition to the traditional single-cycle system.

As you will perhaps know, responsibility for higher education law in the Federal Republic of Germany is divided between the Federal Government and the 16 German *Länder*. The Federal Government has the powers to introduce framework legislation. It is within this framework that the *Länder* establish the detailed legislation governing the institutions of higher education.

The Federal Government introduced the first Framework Act for Higher Education in 1976. The opportunity to test bachelor and master's degree programmes was introduced with the Fourth Amendment to this act in 1998, that is to say, one year before the Bologna Declaration.

The institutions of higher education took immediate advantage of this opportunity. In the meantime, there are already 2,500 such study programmes. This is equivalent to 23% of all courses of study in Germany. Two thirds of the new degree courses are offered at universities; one third at universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*).

The Bologna Process is bolstering this situation. The original intention had been to merely offer the two-cycle system as a further possibility alongside the single-cycle system. However,

with the introduction of the Bologna Process, the discussion on higher education policy began to focus on whether both systems should be continued in parallel in the long term.

The opinion of the overwhelming majority of practitioners involved in adapting single-cycle courses of study into two-cycle courses has been, and still is, that in the long term this parallelity is neither practical from the specialist point of view, nor feasible from the point of view of capacity.

The complete reorganization of courses is still controversial in individual disciplines. This applies in particular to those courses in Germany which end with a state examination. The situation here is as follows:

The courses which lead to a profession in teaching are to be gradually adapted to the two-cycle system. The single-cycle system will be maintained for studies in medicine for the foreseeable future.

That leaves us the field of law. So far, experts in this field have argued against changing to the two-cycle system. However, this question must be reconsidered in the light of the changes to

teacher training courses. The new structures would certainly also offer great opportunities in the field of law.

The Federal Government introduced a second step towards establishing the two-cycle system with the Sixth Amendment to the Framework Act for Higher Education in 2002. This gave a permanent character to bachelor and master's degree courses, which had originally only been introduced on a trial basis.

In 2003, the *Länder* agreed on joint structural requirements for bachelor and master's degree courses. According to these requirements, accreditation presupposes a modularized course structure and the application of the European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement.

Now all that is needed is the third step on the way to completing the European Higher Education Area – the complete or at least widespread adaptation of all courses of study to fit the bachelor or master's structure. The legal and political course for this is to be set by the conference in Bergen in 2005. From 2010, students beginning their studies in Germany will as a rule only be able to enrol in bachelor or master's degree courses.

The realization of the third step is currently taking place at the level of the 16 *Länder* and the universities. The bachelor and master's degree courses will be included in the standard degree courses of the universities in accordance with federal legislation and following an amendment to the legislation on higher education in the respective *Länder*. New courses will only be introduced within the framework of the two-cycle structure. Existing courses will be gradually adapted.

In some *Länder*, the timeframe for adapting the system of study courses is specified in the respective legislation on higher education. In most other *Länder*, however, targets have been agreed with the universities. Both the timeframe for the complete adaptation of the courses as well as the steps towards this goal are stipulated in target agreements. Individual *Länder* are taking account of the progress made in realizing the objectives of the Bologna Process when they provide performance-related funding to universities.

The current *Länder* regulations envisage the completion of the transfer to the two-cycle system between 2006 and 2010.

Other important elements of the Bologna Declaration were the introduction of a credit transfer system and quality assurance for study courses by means of accreditation and evaluation.

The Fourth Amendment to the Framework Act for Higher Education in 1998 already obliged the universities to introduce a credit transfer system.

Since then, there have been numerous initiatives on the part of individual universities and departments, and these have led to the development of different credit point systems. However, these systems are only compatible to a limited extent. It is therefore more practical to apply the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) exclusively in future. The application and observance of the ECTS are also preconditions for the accreditation of all new bachelor and master's study courses.

The 1998 Fourth Amendment to the Framework Act for Higher Education also abolished the old system of framework provisions for examination regulations in favour of the accreditation of study courses. Accreditation was intended to harmonize profiling, on the one hand, and ensuring uniform standards of quality, on the other.

In line with the concept of differentiation and competition, accreditation allows room for different profiling within individual disciplines. It is also in line with this concept that accreditation can take place at different demand and quality levels. This means that each accreditation must ensure certain minimum standards without, however, excluding higher standards on the part of individual accreditation agencies.

In the meantime, Germany has established the accreditation system on a long-term basis. There are currently six accreditation agencies. Each agency is certified by the National Accreditation Council. This Council was set up by the universities and the *Länder*. It establishes minimum standards for the certification of the accreditation agencies and defines general criteria which are to be used for the accreditation of courses of study.

The Fourth Amendment to the Framework Act for Higher Education, which I have already mentioned several times today, committed the universities to regularly evaluating their work in research and teaching. The students are to be involved in evaluating the quality of teaching. The results of the evaluation are to be published.



In order to assist quality assurance at the universities, the Federal Government has launched Project Q in conjunction with the *Länder* and the University Rectors' Conference. This project initiates the exchange and further development of the different processes of quality assurance. It coordinates Germany's position in the international field and actively assists in implementing standards. Its aim is to standardize evaluation procedures and secure minimum standards.

A working group consisting of representatives of the University Rectors' Conference, the *Länder* and the Federal Government is currently drafting a national qualification framework for the higher education sector. This will also take into account the interfaces of higher education with vocational training and lifelong learning. The transparency and comparability of the study courses offered are to be enhanced both nationally and internationally. The results of this work are to be presented at the conference in Bergen.

But the increase in the competitiveness of the European higher education system is not restricted to the field of bachelor or master's degree programmes. It also includes the doctoral level as the third cycle.

Following the introduction of a ruling in the Federal Framework Act for Higher Education in 2002, ten Länder have already introduced fundamental regulations concerning doctoral studies in their respective legislation on higher education. These rulings give post-graduates a special status as doctoral students.

Furthermore, they also contain provisions concerning research-oriented courses of study and mentoring for doctoral students. In addition, 270 postgraduate research groups have been set up at the German universities with a view to enhancing doctoral training.

The signatory states at the Bologna Follow-up Conference in Berlin in September 2003 agreed that they will present a stocktaking of the results of their reforms at the next conference in Bergen. Germany is currently preparing its report.

In anticipation of this report, I hope that I have been able to give you a overview of Germany's political and legislative efforts to realize the European Higher Education Area since the Bologna Declaration of 1999. Germany is already on the right track.

But the universities and the accreditation agencies still have a lot of work to do. We will certainly need the remaining time up to

2010, the target year for the European Higher Education Area, to make this great European reform project also become reality in Germany.

Thank you for your attention.