EU/Bologna Conference 'designing policies for mobile students'
Noordwijk, 10-12 October 2004

General conclusions

The participants of the conference conclude that structural cross-border cooperation between educational institutions and high-quality international mobility of pupils, students and teaching staff at all levels, make an indispensable contribution to creating a well-educated and internationally oriented workforce and strengthen the intellectual, cultural, social, scientific and technological dimensions of the aspired European knowledge based society. When designing policies to facilitate and further mobility this is to be taken into account. Two challenges in designing policies were dealt with at this conference: transparency and student support. It was also expressed by the participants in the conferences that a sustained and continued attention for the actual implementation of already agreed upon policies and policy principles in the field of student mobility (e.g. ECTS, mutual recognition, housing, administrative requirement) is required.

Conclusions on transparency

The workshop on quality assurance and joint degrees made us aware of and showed the elaborated internal quality assurance procedures and practice needed and developed by the various institutions involved in the joint programme presented.
Regarding the external quality assurance and requirements by national governments the workshop appeals to national authorities
-   to standardize criteria or
-   mutually recognize each others accreditation decisions
-   and organize trust.

The workshop "creating transparency in the European Higher Education Landscape" took up one the Presidency conclusions of the informal EU ministers meeting in Rotterdam: It looked into the possibility of developing a European typology to increase the transparency of Europe's more than 3000 institutions of higher education. Participants stressed the importance of implementing and furthering existing instruments and expressed both scepticism and support for the exploration. A major role in developing of such a typology should be played by the educational sector itself. A pilot has started, subsidized by the Socrates programme, in which criteria for such a typology are explored and a draft typology is tried out. The pilot should take into consideration work carried out by UNESCO-CEPES on methodologies used in ranking and league tables and by the UNESCO-OECD activity on Guidelines on Quality Provisions in Cross Border Higher Education. The results of this pilot study could be reported to the Bologna process.

General Conclusion related to the topic 'student support'
The portability of student loans and grants is an important instrument in the promotion of mobility. In the Berlin communiqué, the Ministers responsible for higher education declared that with a view to promoting student mobility, Ministers would take the necessary steps to enable the portability of national loans and grants.

At the Informal Meeting of the EU-Ministers of Education in Rotterdam on July 12 2004, the presidency concluded that portability of grants and loans should be possible. They also stated that the problem of portability of student grants ought to be studied more closely within a EU-context. This should be done in relation to, amongst others, fees and maintenance costs. As a follow up there should be reflection on solutions to the various problems identified.

In the workshop on EU legislation, it was shown that in practice, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) interprets EU legislation in a way that national students and students from another EU-member state are treated more and more on an equal footing. The ECJ has held that EU-citizenship is destined to be the fundamental status of all nationals of the member states of the EU. As a result, entitlements to student support in other EU-member states (the host countries) have been considerably stretched.

At this conference, the study of the CHEPS [1], commissioned by the Bologna working group on the international aspects of loans and grants, was presented. This study shows that the various systems of student support are basically designed for the students that study in their country of origin. If mobile EU-students want to claim student support in another member state, they often have to meet extensive demands (most often residency demands). In the workshop it was concluded that in the long run, a European solution to deal with the differences is desirable.

In the workshop on portability of loans and grants it was concluded that a tension arises between portability of student support and the decisions of the European Court of Justice that stretch the equal treatment principle to broader groups of students in the host country. This approach may prevent EU-member states to make their own systems of student support portable. Under current conditions, the home country principle is preferred by the member states. The problem is not just a problem of some countries, but a threat to mobility as such. The idea was raised that a European fund for student support could reduce some obstacles for mobility. A network of student support experts from the member states should be founded. They should address the issue of portability of student support in a broader economic, social and cultural perspective.

Altogether, the participants of the conference affirm that issues relating to the portability of student support show that this is a complex area, where education policy as well as income politics and social welfare are intertwined, and with national and supra-national interests at stake.

The participants at this conference agree that in light of the wishes to increase mobility, student support is an important subject to be taken up in the context of the European Union, because of the tension between national policies and EU-jurisprudence. The need for cooperation and coordination in this area is felt. We welcome the plan of the European Commission to install a working group that deals with legal issues. The participants of the conference stress that these legal issues are to be linked with political, social and administrative issues. The participants call on all parties involved to take the necessary steps to reach a satisfactory solution for the problems identified.

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[1] Vossensteyn, J.J. Portablity of Student Support: An Inventory of 23 European Countries. Enschede: June 2004.