

Joint statement of Universities of Applied Sciences to the Bologna Process Ministerial Summit

To the ministers of Higher Education, present in London, May 2007

Rectors' conferences and associations representing universities of applied sciences from Germany, Austria, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, and Switzerland discussed the Bologna reforms in higher education and decided to present a contribution to the debate of the Ministers of higher education in London. Universities of Applied Sciences offer professionally oriented higher education in first, second, and sometimes third cycle, and contribute to innovation, particularly in their respective regions, by carrying out applied research.

In the current Bologna process we welcome the recognition of the Ministers for the fact that important prior conditions have to be met to make the European Higher Education Area truly effective. We therefore strongly support the intention of the Ministers to deal with mobility obstacles, to support the operational model of the E4 Group of a Register of European Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies, to enhance the recognition of prior learning and different learning paths, and to widen access and participation.

The current process however should not neglect the broader perspective on major challenges which Europe faces as expressed in the Lisbon goals. To place the Bologna process fully within these challenges, would contribute greatly to the quality of performance of the process and would facilitate the definition of concrete goals. When we look at the most pressing issues for Europe, such as demographic changes, the focus on innovation, and the need for social and economic cohesion, there is a strong need for investment in education and research. Universities of Applied Sciences do combine education and research, the latter being developed in close cooperation with organisations and companies active in the relevant sector of the labour market.

*Universities of Applied Sciences, together with the other higher education institutions (HEI) in Europe, will respond to the challenges Europe is facing by enhancing new professionalism which is characterised by a strong exploratory focus on innovation. As a consequence it is highly necessary that governments ensure that HEI are adequately equipped to increase **(a) access and participation, (b) reiterative innovation processes and (c) social cohesion**. The success of the Bologna process not only depends on promoting transparency, mobility and quality in education, but also depends on how HEI respond to the new expectations of society.*

Therefore we call upon the Ministers to put the following measures into effect within the Bologna process and thus fully align the process with the achievement of the Lisbon goals.

a) access and participation:

- to create continuous learning paths,
- to stress the importance of professional degrees as fully equal to traditional degrees
- to enable transfer from professional to research-oriented cycles

To guarantee a sufficient number of persons with a high level of education in Europe, it is necessary to look at the European Education Area *as a whole* in order to create continuous learning paths. The Bologna process thus should look beyond the borders of higher education to increase its effectiveness. This means in concrete terms ensuring an easy progress from preparatory education and vocational education to higher education, and between the different forms of higher education. Easy transfer thus also entails *the recognition of professionally oriented cycles as equal to the research oriented cycles*. Investing in the quality of preparatory education is another instrument to promote easy transition into higher education.

b) reiterative innovation processes:

- to invest in the cooperation between universities of applied sciences and industry
- to invest in the quality of teaching staff according to the new demands
- to invest in the building up of a satisfactory infrastructure for applied sciences

Cooperation between universities (of applied sciences) and industry needs to be intensified by gearing it more effectively towards innovation, new business start-ups and the transfer and dissemination of knowledge. Conducting *practically oriented research* is one important way of realising this.

UAS, combining education and research and acting as knowledge vectors, are important players for the advancement of professions, companies and industries thus innovating the labour market and enhancing skills and competences.

Next to contributing to the far-reaching and current knowledge of the professional practice of lecturers, practically oriented research makes a direct contribution to the quality of work placements and graduation assignments. The support of cooperation between universities of applied sciences and industry should be intensified in this respect.

Structured partnerships with the business community (including SMEs) bring opportunities for universities of applied sciences to improve the sharing of the results of practically oriented research. To secure these benefits, most universities of applied sciences will need more external support. Structural financing for applied research therefore is necessary, so that innovative projects can be carried out by universities of applied sciences in cooperation with industry and SMEs, networks with the world of work can be intensified and the need for relevant projects can be formulated.

c) social cohesion:

- setting up talent programmes

Universities of applied science have a tradition in accommodating non-traditional, mature and part-time students. Special attention is needed for students from the least privileged backgrounds and students from an allochthonous background. To support these students and to guarantee equal access and chances of success, we ask to intensify programmes intended at discovering and supporting talented students from these groups.

This declaration calls upon the ministers, coming together in London:

- to stress the importance of professional first cycle and second cycle degree programmes and to recognise them as fully equal to other degree programmes, enabling easy transfer from professional to research oriented programmes and *vice versa*. The professional doctorates (in the third cycle) being implemented or planned in some countries should be analysed in order to find their proper place in the higher education system.
- to decide not only to improve the integration of the European higher education area with the European research area (Bologna), but also with the European research and innovation area (Lisbon) and so strengthening innovation activities of higher education institutions.

HBO-raad, the Netherlands

FHK, Austria

Council of directors of institutes of Technology, Ireland

Rectors Conference of Professional HEI, Estonia

KFH, Switzerland

CVU-Rektorkollegiet, Denmark

Arene, Finland