

**8th Meeting of UNICA Bologna Lab Coordinators,
University of Zagreb, Dubrovnik
July 3, 2008**

Summary

Introduction

The following present a summary of the UNICA Bologna-Laboratory Meeting in Dubrovnik on July 3, 2008. Hosted by the University of Zagreb, Melita Kovacevic, Vice-Rector of the University of Zagreb, opens the meeting by addressing the issue of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes, Kovacevic argued, have not yet been fully embraced by the academic community. Together with the somewhat elusive nature of the Bachelor's degree this deficit contributes to hampering the progress of the Bologna-Process. If universities are to play a decisive role in the future it will be crucial to actively engage in change, to create rather than merely react to new developments within the EHEA. The eroding boundaries between universities, mushrooming alternative educational institutions and the society at large will ask for a new approach, one informed by flexibility and the need for innovation.

UNICA Projects

Kris de Jonckheere, UNICA Secretary General and David Baldinger, UNICA Bologna Lab Moderator, go on to introduce new activities of the network. One central new initiative is called Be-Twin. Geared at bridging the two credit systems of ECTS and ECVET, UNICA takes an active role in devising a new methodology to allow for a sound comparison between these hitherto isolated systems. Universities no longer boast their traditional monopoly on higher education. The huge pressure from the realm of vocational *education* and training demands intensified efforts of cooperation. Arthur Mettinger refers to the increasing transfer between these two spheres as both inevitable and a chance. Proactive institutions, he argues, need to determine their educational profiles and thus maintain the right to select their students and define their offers. The Coordinators subscribe to the notion that an increased diversity in the stream of educational offers provides an asset to the European Higher Education Area.

The UNICA approach to the Be-Twin project, which has been informed by contributions of the Meeting, includes the following issues:

- Concepts of learning outcomes have to be clarified in both spheres
- Higher education institutions support the design of Learning outcomes as measurable, succinct and explicit statements
- A common denominator and translation tool should be conceptualised
- Learning and training should be seen as an educational continuum with different emphasis dependent on HE or VET sphere under the mainstream of lifelong learning
- UNICA higher education institutions support the idea that learning outcomes should be coupled with workload but remain primacy – workload is subordinated to the learning outcomes
- Define a glossary of indispensable terms which underpin both concepts and might still carry conflicting connotations – important European role to stress this need
- Learning outcomes should be established as a concrete tool to translate between both worlds and to assess and revitalise and innovate existing programmes in both spheres
- quality assurance of learning outcomes of both spheres – learning outcomes must be based on QA
- The receiving institution should be responsible for setting the entrance threshold for education and/or training for study purposes
- mapping which professions already have established agreed-upon sectoral standards – strategies how to deal with different areas and apply different approaches to regulated and non-regulated professions

Another new key project is launched within the in the frame of the Erasmus Mundus Action IV call for proposal – the revitalised idea of the European Campus. UNICA's partners in this project are ESN, Youth Agora, Brussels Education Services, ORION (a Latin American network) and a selection of pilot universities. The project is set to start on November 1, 2008 and to last until

2010. The project champions a new approach and seeks to foster the external dimension of the Bologna Process by brightlining Europe as a site of higher education on the world map.

The EC project will be organised in a top-down manner. It will be structured along languages or language clusters. Only later a free-mover-zone might become a reality. For the time being a simple yet rich basket of offers from member institutions shall suffice. Another future step in the process might be the harmonisation of the Diploma Supplement within the EC-group.

Arthur Mettinger informs the group that a basic stock of 50+ programmes is expected to feature in a first round. These will be Master's and PhD programmes exclusively. The project furthermore plans to feature the aspect of UNICA mobility. This would allow non-European students in UNICA excellence programmes to spend time at another UNICA institutions with only a minimum of administrative hurdles. The institutions' international offices should coordinate these aspects. All together the successful implementation would guarantee added value not only for the students in question but also for the entire UNICA network. The following steps are next on the agenda.

1. Get the green light from the highest UNICA level, the General Assembly, to implement action and policy informed by the EUA's Standards and Guidelines paper.
2. Produce a paper to be decided upon by the UNICA rectors
3. Install a board, which decides on the actual programmes fulfilling all the criteria
4. Apply standardised criteria for the presentation of relevant information. These criteria hark back to the last Bologna-Laboratory meeting in Zagreb in December 2007 and have to be refined in the months to come.

It is the task of the Bologna Lab Coordinators to prepare their institutions so that the rectors know the general drift of the planned project.

Presentations

Ossi Lindqvist, of the University of Kuopio and former chairman of FINHEEC, alerts the Bologna Lab Coordinators to the bigger picture of higher education in the throes of a rapidly changing world. He addresses and reconciles diverse issues such as a ranking-based approach to education, the reaction of the labour market to new impulses within higher education, the real value of mobility or the success of quality assurance. In concluding he notes that education remains a key factor in regulating the relationship between society and the individual.

Two more presentations complete the day. Marina Steinmann of the DAAD presents a brand-new study on learning outcomes and employability. The study reached the conclusion that soft-skills are more important (in this context important translates as desired by the labour market) than subject-specific skills. Soft skills, Steinmann argues, are often tied to the experience of international mobility. Very much in tune with the opening words of Melita Kovacevic, she then gleans that learning outcomes have not yet been fully grasped. Employability too remains a concept, which means different things to different people. Modern universities struggle to ease the double pull of autonomy on the one hand and increasing accountability on the other.

Milan Mesic of the University of Zagreb concludes the meeting by offering his very hands-on account of the repercussions of a learning outcomes-based approach on teaching and learning. He diagnoses an imminent danger of devising too specific Bachelor's programmes which lack flexibility. Continuous dialogue with all partners, students, teachers and representatives of the world of enterprise, can safeguard successful curriculum reform.

The meeting concludes with the proposal of a new set-up for the Bologna-Laboratory.

New set-up for the Bologna-Laboratory

New perspectives

With the Bologna Process continuing to operate as a catalyst to expand Europe's integration to an educational space the current UNICA Bologna-Laboratory reconsidered its original mission. Based on the current situation, anticipated developments in the coming years the following recommendations have been presented at the Lab meeting in Dubrovnik. The following five action lines shall underpin the future work of the Bologna-Laboratory and in so doing provide impulses to the network.

1. University outreach
2. University-enterprise partnership – employability
3. Didactics and learning in the context of lifelong learning
 - a. The creation of educational institutional profiles
4. Anchoring the Bologna Process – learning from each other
 - a. Adaptation of administrative processes
5. The capital dimension – how can the role and profile of UNICA institutions as capital institutions be accentuated for the benefit of the network

The Bologna-Laboratory strives to diversify its tasks, to branch out into new niches of the Bologna Process and to anticipate new challenges and trends through collective Lab efforts.

New Bologna-Lab Coordinators

In order to simultaneously broaden the expertise of the Lab's Coordinators each institution should nominate up to five Bologna-Lab Coordinators with individual corresponding sets of expertise and experience. These should come from a variety of offices and hold a number of positions within the university. Flexibility and broad inclusion should guide the selection of the new Bologna-Lab Coordinators.

Information flows

Structures should be put in place whereby the individual member institution safeguards both the information flow between university leadership and the dissemination and sharing of the UNICA Bologna-Laboratory information between the Bologna-Lab Coordinators. One possibility to do so is the organisation of regular meetings of the Bologna-Lab Coordinators.

Meetings

Within these new structures the Bologna-Laboratory shall meet twice per year with a clear focus on one of the above mentioned dimensions. The chosen topic shall inform the entire meeting.