Changes in European Higher Education and the Bologna Process

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The Bologna process is a joint venture between 47 European countries with the objective to create the European Higher Education Area, EHEA, by 2010 and now prolonged to 2020. The EHEA will cover all of Europe including European Union newcomers Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The Bologna Process intended to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education. Its aim is to allow for degrees and qualifications awarded in one country to be understood and recognized in other countries, thereby facilitating mobility and enhancing employability. The EHEA’s overarching goals will be achieved by providing common tools and fostering cooperation in quality assurance. The common Bologna tools in the EHEA, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, Diploma supplement, a three-cycle system, and qualification frameworks, all aim to provide a system that is easy to comprehend for students, institutions, and employers. The various ministerial biannual meetings since 1999 have broadened this agenda and have given greater precision to the Bologna tools. The undergraduate/postgraduate degree (bachelor-master) structure has been modified into a three-cycle system including doctoral studies. The concept of qualifications frameworks has been introduced with an emphasis on learning outcomes to promote a shift from teaching to learning. The social dimension and external dimension has been introduced.

In Sweden, the Bologna process has triggered a major reform of the higher education. The reform in 2007 included the introduction of a three cycle system, ECTS (European Credit Transfer and accumulation System) as well as descriptors in the higher education ordinance formulated as learning outcomes for the bachelor, master and doctoral degrees.

In Sweden the main terms for level descriptors for the bachelor- and master degrees are formulated in the Higher Education Act. These descriptions are related to the Qualifications Framework of the Bologna Process and they are formulated for general qualifications as objectives under three headings; knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities, judgment and approach. Three universities collaborated in a national project with the purpose to enhance quality in chemistry education by benchmarking the impact of the reform, sharing experiences and establish good practice during 2008-2009. Here, we present outcome of the project, including a comparison of the descriptors/learning outcomes for the bachelor and master degree and for separate modules/courses and in particular the diploma work. It is evident that the choice of strategy on behalf of the institution gave different outcomes. It poses interesting questions regarding achieving the overall goals of the Bologna process like mobility, recognition and employability. A second phase started 2010 with collaboration of three universities; Lund, Göteborg and Uppsala. The main objectives are to prepare for quality assurance, quality enhancement and competence development for the teachers.