

Chapter 3

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN FINLAND

Perspectives from the Basic Units

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1. INTRODUCING THE OBJECT OF THE RESEARCH AND THE THEORETICAL DEVICES USED

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how the Bologna Process influences Finnish higher education by examining what changes are related to or caused by it. The study focuses first on the social field of national higher education policy-making, and second on the study of higher education institutions examined from the perspective of academic basic units.

The study is based on critical analysis of national policy documents and on a qualitative case study conducted at the University of Jyväskylä in the spring term of 2004. The qualitative case study was based on thematic focus group interviews. The themes of the interview can be found in the Appendix 1.

In order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena taking place in higher education the choice of academic departments was influenced by studies of academic cultures (see Becher and Trowler 2001). A more detailed methodological discussion will be offered in section 5.

The idea of a *social field of action* is adopted from Bleiklie et al. (2000) to focus attention on the fact that the nature of Finnish higher education policy-making and the analysis of the Bologna Process should be understood as interactive processes taking place simultaneously at various levels of European and national higher education systems. It should not be defined as an example of a top-down or bottom-up implementation strategy. Theoretically, this study also borrows from the ideas of Czarniawska and

Sévon (1996) who define the processes of change as *processes of cultural translation* rather than implementation or adaptation of reforms. In this chapter, we will ask how the ideas of the Bologna declaration (and those of the communiqués of the Prague and Berlin ministerial meetings) are seen and understood (in other words *translated*) within the university's basic units.

2. CONTEXTS FOR THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Finnish universities admitted 20,651 students, while the polytechnics accepted 25,662 young students and 6,175 adult education students in 2001. A comparison of these numbers with the size of the relevant age cohort reveals that about 70 per cent are offered a starting place in higher education (Välimaa 2001, 2004). There are 20 universities and 32 polytechnics in Finland at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a ratio of one higher education institution per 100,000 inhabitants. The expansion of Finnish higher education between the 1960s and the 1990s was both closely linked to and a result of a welfare-state agenda supported by all major political parties. All major provinces were allowed to establish a university between the 1960s and the 1980s. Finnish higher education became a mass higher education system in the 1970s when over 15 per cent of the age cohort entered higher education institutions (Välimaa 2001).

From a historical perspective it can be stated that university and higher education have been considered important aspects of the development of the Finnish nation and nation state. Traditionally, universities have been defined as national cultural institutions rooted in the Humboldtian ideals of the university. Training civil servants has always been an important social function of Finnish higher education, in part because the majority of university students are and have been employed by the public sector. In the 1990s, higher education institutions were defined as an important partner in the national innovation system. The high social prestige of universities and university degrees (and academics) remains a social reality in Finland in the twenty-first century (Välimaa 2001).

2.1 A short introduction into the social dynamics of Finnish higher education policymaking

Finnish higher education policy in the modern sense emerged in the 1960s, since when the development of Finnish higher education has been guided by

various higher education development acts. The first Higher Education Development Act covered the years 1967 to 1986, after which new higher education development acts have become a necessary political routine. The first Higher Education Development Act was accompanied by the Council of State's expectations concerning the measures to be taken by higher education institutions, which is another essential element related to the implementation of the development act. It can be said that the Higher Education Development Act and the governmental decisions connected to it opened a new space for higher education policy-making: increased university funding for a mass higher education system legitimised the Government's endeavour to reform universities, or to put it another way, enabled hitherto unparalleled and unprecedented interference in the internal life of universities. This trend has continued but with different focuses in different decades. An essential fact in the Finnish context is that national higher education policy-making has been understood as a national instrument in increasing the efficiency and societal relevance of higher education, regardless of how these policy goals have been defined over the preceding decades. During the 1980s government 'expectations' emphasised effective planning and co-operation in research activities; productivity received more attention in the allocation of resources; and university evaluation was developed. These expectations were to be realised by increasing the autonomy of the universities (Välilmaa 1994). In the 1990s, the trend was to make Finnish higher education institutions more efficient as institutions and more productive as part of the national innovation system. The main policy tool has been the steering system known as "Management by Results". The most important reform of the 1990s was the establishment of polytechnics in Finland (see Välilmaa 2001) with the aim of improving the quality of higher vocational education to the international level and increasing the choice open to students in higher education.

2.2 The field of higher education reforms and the strategy of gradual reform

It is possible to identify characteristics common to all Finnish higher education reform: first, reform usually has a national goal that is defined in a higher education policy document; second, the reform processes are normally associated with experiments carried out in one or more higher education institutions. All Finnish experiments have been supported by follow-up studies (although their outcomes have not always been utilised); third, the aim of the reforms has been to establish new systems or practices across the entire higher education system (see Välilmaa 2005).

3. THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN FINLAND

The Bologna Process is a hot topic at all levels of the Finnish higher education system. Finnish higher education policy makers aim to implement this reform at the system level, higher education institutions are developing institutional policies to implement the Bologna Process, and academics are occupied with the requirements of making curricula changes to take into account two cycles of degrees. From the research perspective, it is both interesting to analyse the changes taking place in Finnish higher education, and theoretically challenging to analyse how international pressures are translated in the local conditions and traditions of academic basic units. In what follows we will describe how the Bologna Process has been defined in the national higher education policy field, as well as the elements of the implementation strategy adopted by the Ministry of Education.

3.1 The nature of the Bologna Process at the national level

The expected impact of the Bologna Process on national higher education policy seems to have changed as the Process has been taking place. In its initial phase (1999-2000), it was important for the Ministry of Education to ‘sell’ the idea by focusing on general problems that the Bologna Process could help to alleviate in Finnish and European higher education. This policy was also necessary because Finnish higher education institutions were not eager to join the Bologna Process. At this initial phase the main problems the Bologna Process was intended to solve (Lehikoinen 2001) were as follows:

1. The high dropout rate from higher education—dropping out of higher education has been a consistent topic in Finnish higher education policymaking. It has been defined a problem both at the system and at the individual levels. Basically, this is a question of selection for higher education, as well as the social reproduction of society through education. It was assumed that the Bologna Process would decrease the number of dropouts because the chance of students receiving a degree would increase.
2. Transition from higher education to work—the transition from higher education to the world of work has been a problematic issue. It has been assumed that the two-tier structure of degrees will make it easier to move from higher education into working life.
3. Prolongation of studies—one of the traditional concerns in Finnish higher education policy has been that the time taken to complete studies

has been excessive, particularly in the universities. It was assumed that this problem would be removed when each student leaving a higher education institution had a degree.

4. The objective of lifelong learning would be better achieved — it was stated that the objective of lifelong learning would be better achieved with the introduction of a two-tier degree structure, comparable degrees and the modularization of studies.
5. Problems of student mobility — one of the national goals has been to increase the mobility of students. It was assumed that Bologna Process would help to make Finnish higher education more international.

Thus, *the benefits of the two degree cycles* would make it easier to make personal study plans, to increase the modularization of studies and advance student mobility in European higher education and the labour market. It was also interesting that in this early phase of Bologna Process argumentation, Finnish higher education was seen as part of the European Higher Education Area, with common problems that needed to be solved.

After the European Ministers of Education Meeting in Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003), Finnish national policy objectives related to the Bologna Process were modified. According to the Ministry of Education (MinEdu 2004) the main policy objectives are now as follows:

1. Adoption of the comprehensive structure of degrees—central instruments in reaching this objective are ECTS and the Diploma Supplement.
2. Unified degree structures—the structure of degrees will be developed on the basis of two main degree cycles. The first cycle is a three or four-year bachelor-level degree, which should also be relevant to the European labour market. The second cycle consists of MA and doctoral-level degrees.
3. The implementation of ECTS—the ECTS system will be brought into use.
4. Increasing mobility—the mobility of students, teachers and other staff will be increased significantly. Obstacles to mobility will be removed.
5. European dimension in quality assurance—European co-operation will be increased to find common methods and definitions of levels. The European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) will be an essential actor in this process.
6. Promotion of European dimensions in higher education—international co-operation and networking will be increased together with training in languages and cultures.

It can be seen that the national goals defined by the Ministry of Education repeat the goals declared at the Prague and Berlin meetings. From the perspective of research it is interesting to note that only two of the original national policy concerns (the two-cycle system of degrees and the mobility of students) have remained on the national political agenda of the Bologna Process. This may be interpreted in two different ways: firstly, it might mean that there could be significant differences between the initial phase of the Bologna Process and its implementation after the Prague meeting; second, it might also mean that the difference described is mainly a rhetorical change explained by the Ministry of Education's need to adapt to European policies. A committee report, which first mentions national goals and then those relevant to the Bologna Process, supports the latter interpretation (OPM 2004). A combination of these interpretations would be to assume that the Bologna Process has changed Finnish policy formulation even though it is not yet clear what the relationship between this symbolic reformulation and the reality of policy-making will be.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

As discussed above, since the European Ministers of Education Meeting in Prague and Berlin the main challenge for Finland has been seen in terms of adapting to the changes caused by the Bologna Process. This process of adaptation has in turn followed its own logic, being inspired by the goal of keeping up with the rest of Europe. The challenges of adaptation are threefold: to make changes in national legislation, to change both the content and structure of curricula, to create national and institutional systems of accreditation. Consequently, Finnish implementation of the Bologna Process is based on three main methods: national committees nominated to prepare changes in legislation, national seminars on the Bologna Process, and national co-ordination groups to make national curricula plans for each discipline. In what follows, each of these methods is described and analysed in more detail.

4.1 Changes in legislation

A number of committees have been set up to make Finnish higher education prepare for the changes caused by the Bologna Process. The committee has been mandated to draft the required amendments to legislation. The committees related to the Bologna Process are:

The Committee on the International Strategy of Higher Education Institutions—which completed its work in 2001. Although not directly related to the Bologna Process it did, however, formulate policy goals for Finnish higher education policymaking and higher education institutions (OPM 2001). For this reason, it is normally viewed as one of the committees preparing Finnish higher education for the Bologna Process.

The Committee for the Development of University Degrees—which was established in January 2002. According to public documents (OPM 2002):

The mandate of the committee was to propose a reform of the university degree structure to comprise two cycles and measures needed to implement the two-tier structure in all study fields.

As the committee proposed, a two-tier degree structure is being adopted in Finnish higher education in all study fields from 1 August 2005. By that time an ECTS-based system¹ will replace the former credit system. The committee wished to emphasise that the reform should not lead to an increase in degree requirements and that the new syllabi should be based on field-specific core content analysis. The committee's proposal was that the Bachelor's degree should incorporate 180 credits (three years of study) and that the Master's degree would entail 120 credits (two years of study). The committee further proposed that:

The universities develop specific master's programmes in response to the needs of research and the labour market. The students would be selected to these programmes in a separate application process. The admission requirement would be an appropriate bachelor-level degree, polytechnic degree or a corresponding level of education. In the case of substantial difference in the content of prior studies, the universities could require supplementary studies of 60 credits at the maximum (OPM 2002).²

The committee also proposes that universities arrange degree programmes taught in foreign languages, which had already been suggested by the Committee on the International Strategy of Higher Education Institutions.

The second national challenge created by the Bologna Process is the idea of quality assurance and accreditation mentioned in the Communiqué of the Berlin Conference. In Finland the *Committee on Quality Assurance in Higher Education* was established to analyse existing quality assurance systems and recommend the development of Finnish higher education quality assurance. The committee felt that a new context exists for Finnish higher education as a consequence of globalisation. Therefore, more attention

¹One year of studies would comprise 1600 student work hours and give 60 credits.

² The committee also proposes that the present 20 Decrees governing university degrees be revoked and replaced by one Government Decree on university degrees.

needs to be paid to the demands caused by international development when defining national quality objectives and quality assurance criteria. The Committee suggested that quality assurance in Finnish higher education should consist of three elements: national higher education policy, national evaluation and the higher education institutions' own quality assurance mechanism. In order to achieve these three elements the committee recommends that:

Universities and polytechnics develop quality assurance systems, which comprise all spheres of operation in the higher education institution. The quality assurance systems should a) meet the developing quality assurance criteria of the European Higher Education Area, b) be part of the operational steering and management system, c) cover the entire operation of the higher education institution, d) be interrelated as part of the normal operations of the higher education institution, e) be continuous, f) be documented, and g) enable the participation of all members of the higher education community in quality work (OPM 2004).

The committee also states that:

In response to the objectives set in the Berlin Communiqué, auditing of the quality assurance systems of universities and polytechnics will be taken into use in Finland.

Auditing in the Finnish context means a process whereby the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council will organise the audit in co-operation with the higher education institutions. The objective is that the audits will be carried out periodically and that all quality assurance systems of the higher education institutions will be audited once by the year 2010 (OPM 2004). As a starting point for these reforms the committee states, however, that the higher education institutions have the principal responsibility for the development and quality of the education they provide. Maybe it is for this reason that the committee says nothing about the practicalities of institutional quality assurance systems.

The third committee mandated to suggest changes in Finnish higher education was organised on April 5, 2004. The aim of the *Committee on the Framework of Qualifications* is to create well-structured and comprehensible descriptions of the framework of Finnish higher education degrees. The latter is expected to include the description of Finnish academic degrees on the basis of the following indicators: the amount of work required to finish a degree, the level of degrees, the achievement of defined learning outcomes, the qualifications for further studies, and students' professional competence.

4.2 Implementation plan

The implementation plan (see Figure 4.1) shows not only that the implementation of the degree reform is taken seriously, but also that it is strictly led by the Ministry of Education. The implementation plan of the Degrees Reform resembles the rational plan of the Great Degrees Reform of the 1970s with the exception of the small arrows trying to reach the Ministry of Education from the bottom of the figure (see Välimaa 2004).

The notion of rational planning is also repeated in the national disciplinary-based co-ordination groups. The Ministry of Education nominates these national co-ordination groups in the following fields of study: Dentistry, Economics, Education, Health Sciences, Humanities, Language Studies, Law, Medicine, Psychology, Pharmacy, Science, Social Sciences, Social Work, Technical Sciences, Veterinary Medicine (MinEdu 2004b).

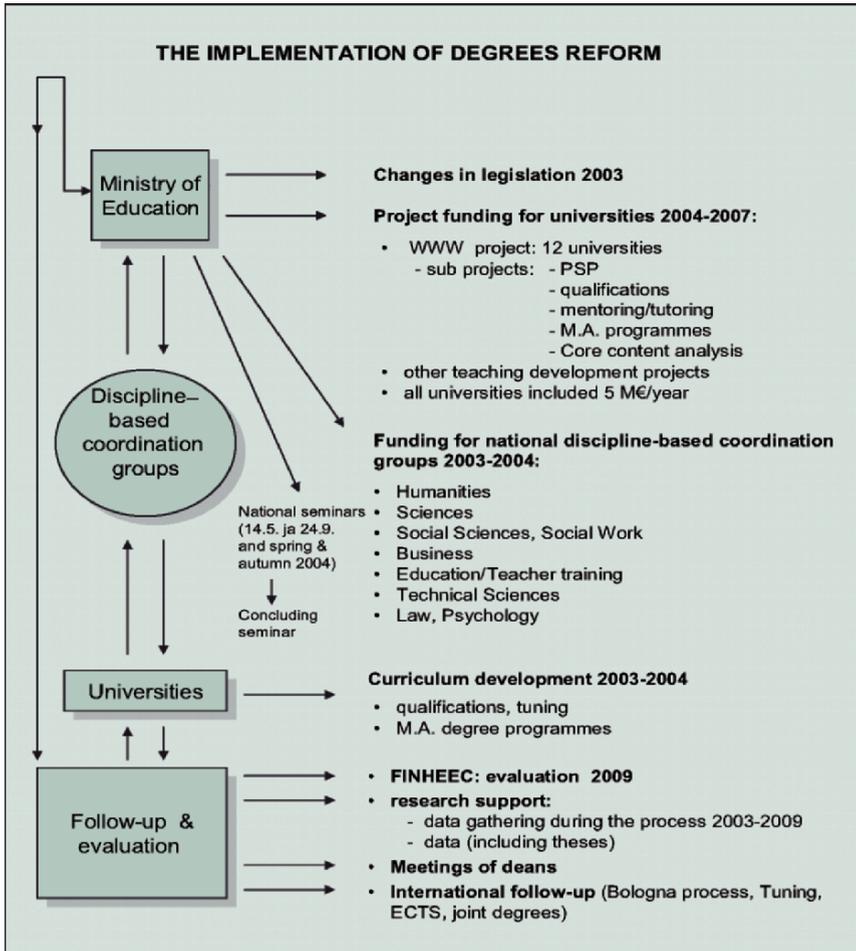


Figure 4.1. The implementation plan for the reform of university degrees in Finland. Source: Ministry of Education (www.minedu.fi/opm/koulutus/yliopistokoulutus/bologna)

The Ministry of Education emphasises the following principles in the implementation of the Bologna Process. Firstly, that the change from study weeks to ECTS should not be based on a mechanical calculation but on comprehensive core curricula analysis. Secondly, the Ministry of Education

emphasises the use of personal study plans (also because it has been emphasised in the political agenda of the national Government).

4.3 National seminars

The national seminars focused on the Bologna Process were intended to make the academic community commit to the process and disseminate information about it. The organisation of national seminars also shows the importance of the success of the Bologna Process for the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education offered a free lunch to each of the participants in the seminars. Participation, however, was voluntary (and every participant knows well that there is ‘no such thing as a free lunch’). The themes in the national seminar on reforming curricula organised by the Ministry of education 24 September 2003 (MinEdu 2004c) also show the importance of the topics to be taken seriously during the process. The participants in the national seminar were organised into working groups on the following themes: personal study plans, core curriculum analysis, the process of reforming curricula, and reflections on various structures for two-cycle degrees.

5. PERSPECTIVES ON THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FROM THE BASIC UNITS

As we have shown above, the implementation of the Bologna Process has begun at the national level in Finnish higher education policy-making. Higher education institutions have been, however, rather passive actors in the Bologna Process even though most Finnish higher education institutions have appointed some kind of co-ordination team to inform the institution about the Bologna Process and to prepare for the changes (see: Finheec 2004).

As far as we know, these institutional implementation plans have not been defined in great detail. Therefore, the analysis of the impact of the Bologna Process from the perspective of basic units reveals what is concretely happening in Finnish higher education institutions. Our main concern here is to analyse similarities and differences among six departments in the University of Jyväskylä with regard to how the Bologna Process is connected to the functioning of academic basic units.

The University of Jyväskylä is typical of multi-disciplinary and medium-sized universities in Finland. It has seven faculties (Business, Education, Information Technology, Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences and Mathematics,

Sport and Health Sciences). There are about 15,000 students and about 1,350 permanent staff members in the university with an annual budget of about €95 m.

The aim of the case study is to analyse how basic units define the Bologna Process and how it influences their functioning. The goal of this type of qualitative research is not intended to be the production of knowledge that can be generalised throughout the Finnish system of higher education. Our aim is, however, to illustrate meanings and identify relevant social phenomena and processes that are related to the Bologna Process. We will also reflect on our findings in relation to our theoretical frames of reference (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Bleiklie et al. 2000; Becher and Trowler 2001).

5.1 On the method of focus group interviews

We interviewed 4-7 people from each of the selected basic units in the focus group interview (see Krueger 1994; Sulkunen 1990 in Pötsönen, Pennanen 1998) on the uses of the focus group method. In total 27 academics were interviewed: 8 professors (or heads of department), 5 lecturers, 3 senior assistants (or post doctorates), 4 assistants (or university teachers), 6 amanuenses (or other administrative staff members)³ and three male students. The interviewees ranged between 30 and 60 years of age with 15 male and 12 female academic staff members. We selected the academic basic units using the categories described by Becher (1989): two from soft and pure disciplines (e.g. sociology, history), two from soft and applied disciplines (e.g. social work, teacher training), one from a hard and pure discipline (e.g. physics), and one from a hard and applied discipline (e.g. medicine, engineering, information technology). We will analyse the interviews based on the basic unit rather than the discipline (see Becher and Kogan 1992 on basic units). We will assume that the basic units have a shared understanding of the Bologna Process because they need to make the curricula changes together, even though Finnish basic units normally consist of several disciplines.

The procedure for the interview was the following: the interviewers worked in pairs, one as the lead interviewer and the other assisting (see the Appendix 1) with the roles being alternated between interviewers and interviews. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and they were carried out in the basic unit concerned. In addition to taping the interviews and writing down the contents of the answers, field notes were taken

³ The groupings are based on the nature of the work (leadership position, administration, teaching, research).

concerning the physical location and social interaction between the interviewees. These field notes gave us valuable information not only concerning the atmosphere in the basic unit, but also concerning attitudes to the Bologna Process. The field notes also influenced our interpretations on the content of the answers. For example, in one of the basic units the academics consulted their notes before answering our questions. This indicates that they were either not very familiar with what has been done in the basic unit or were not sure what they should say to us, although most interviewees could respond spontaneously about what they thought about the Process.

The analysis of the interviews is based on themes that came up during the interviews. We analysed the answers by using the group as an entity without differentiating between individuals.

5.2 Understandings and definitions of the Bologna Process

We began our interviews by asking what the basic units understand by the Bologna Process: What is it all about? Most commonly the answer to this question was along the lines of: *The main thing as we understand it, is that this is a system of degrees, the Bachelor and then the Master; and that this would hopefully be a unified system in Europe for whichever countries want the agreement.* All basic units also added that the implementation of ECTS is one of the most important goals of the Bologna Process.

In addition to these general notions, there were significant differences between expectations of the Bologna Process. In what follows we will attend to three different approaches to the Bologna Process to show the degree of variation.

5.2.1 Soft-applied basic unit: positive expectations

This basic unit began its response by defining the Bologna Process as an opportunity to enhance the quality of curricula and to increase co-operation and networking in Finland and Europe. For them the Bologna Process opens an opportunity to discuss the pedagogical perspectives and potentials opened by the Bologna Process. They also considered it a positive development that the University of Jyväskylä has emphasised the pedagogical aspect of the Bologna Process by paying attention to curriculum development needs in and through the Bologna Process. Core content analysis is seen as a useful device in this context. In a broader perspective they also stated that the Bologna Process serves as “a counter strike” to Japan and the US in the

name of the European ethos in higher education. Our European objectives are to make general rules to increase mobility, internationalisation, European homogenisation and economic compatibility. They also noticed that the two-cycle model of higher education is taken from the Anglo-American system of higher education. In Finland, the aim is to increase domestic mobility between and inside higher education institutions. In short, this soft and applied basic unit takes a positive view of the Bologna Process, which seems to open new opportunities for their internal development.

One of the internal reasons for their positive attitude may be the fact that they have not renewed their curricula for many years. It seems that external challenges opened by the Bologna Process are regarded as positive because it may also benefit their internal curriculum renewal needs. Additional external pressures to develop their curricula are caused by the fact that in Finland their professional education is organised by universities with the Master's degree being the normal basic degree, whereas in most European countries the BA is the basic degree with that education provided by lower-status higher education institutions.

5.2.2 Bologna Process from critical perspectives: “the Push from above”

Some of the academics criticised the Bologna Process strongly. In a soft-pure basic unit, the Bologna Process was referred to as “a new liturgy” which forces them to adapt to a new kind of rhetorical language. It also forces them to implement a two-cycle system of degrees, even though they regard it as absolutely useless in humanities and social sciences. Social scientists also defined the Bologna Process as one of the typical European processes initiated at the top level without taking into account the needs of the basic units. The goal of the Bologna Process was defined as an attempt to improve co-operation between universities and business enterprises.

5.2.3 Soft-pure basic unit: mixed feelings

One of the most revealing discussions around this question took place in a basic unit representing soft disciplines. The answer to the question started with the notion that the Bologna Process means “a lot of work—maybe for nothing”. This somewhat cynical answer was continued with the statement that the Bologna Process attempts to fit the Finnish model into a pattern [Anglo-American], “which is not necessarily best for us”. It was supported by the notion that the process has been started by “a push from above”. However, these opinions were contrasted by another opinion focusing on the “interesting possibilities” that the Bologna Process may create, especially for

students. It was also said that the Bologna Process offers an opportunity to reflect on what they think and what they appreciate in the department.

These discussions reveal the main themes related to the Bologna Process in most basic units. On the one hand, the Bologna Process was criticised as an example of a typical top-down process in the European Union. It was said to be forcing Finnish university departments into changes in the name of European unity. In this context, it was described as useless or even harmful. On the other hand, the academics interviewed also saw that the Bologna Process may open new opportunities, especially for students, and it may force departments to reflect on their activities critically and to improve their curricula and functioning. This perspective was especially emphasised by a basic unit in a hard and pure discipline.

5.3 Changes related to the Bologna Process

In addition to discussing attitudes and expectations at the basic units, we also were interested in knowing what they have actually done as a result of the Bologna Process. This question was problematic because the new curricula will have to be put into service in Finnish higher education from August 1 2005. This was not, however, the only problem with our causal assumption. More problems were caused by the variation between basic units: some of them have already reorganised or have begun to reorganise their curricula in the spirit of the Bologna Process, whereas at the other end of the continuum nothing has even been planned. Therefore, in what follows, we will describe the changes in all basic units that we interviewed. As a starting point we need to say that most basic units stated that the Bologna Process has increased their internal interaction and co-operation with other Finnish higher education institutions.

5.3.1 Hard-applied basic unit: reorganisation of Bachelor-level studies

This basic unit was reorganised a couple of years ago when two departments were merged (consisting of about 260 staff members). During the reorganisation they also renewed their curricula for Bachelor-level studies (first three years of studies). The curricula content was developed with the help of standards created by the Association for Computer Machinery (AMC) and using core contents analysis. Curricula structures were reorganised according to the core competencies required in the field, more than by providing teaching in the topics that traditionally have been taught in the two departments. As a consequence, the number of courses provided decreased

from 180 to 130-160 in one year. The number of students remained the same. They have also prepared Master's degree curricula and begun to develop an international Master's degree programme. However, students do not normally finish their studies with a Bachelor degree because it is not regarded as a 'real' degree, but rather as a stage in their studies.

At the beginning of the curriculum reform, the objective was to create a modular model consisting of rather independent study modules. However, the idea did not work well, leading to the present situation with the two 'modules' of Bachelor degree and Master degree studies. Major and minor subjects are contained in these two 'modules'.

Some representatives of this basic unit have publicly stated that they have already implemented the Bologna Process (and continued: "what's the problem with the others?"). The interviewed academics said, however, that they would have started the changes even without the Bologna Process. It seems that the Bologna Process has supported them in continuing the processes of curriculum changes.

5.3.2 Hard-pure basic unit: preparing for change

In this basic unit the interviewed academics said that they have made many changes (e.g. to English-language course materials) even though they have not yet been implemented. They also plan to establish an English-Language Master's programme, an initiative influenced by the Bologna Process, although this will not be a radical change, rather a gradual development in the department, which they describe as "thoroughly internationalised". They also said that the Bologna Process might prove to be useful because the old and the new degree structures are so different from one another. However, it was suggested that the first (Bachelor) degree was not closely connected to the Finnish labour market, although the graduates may well find employment opportunities elsewhere in the European Union. Another important point they made was that "*The Bologna Process brings nothing new in terms of the subject material that is taught, it's mainly how it is organised.*" This means that the discipline remains untouched while the institution, that is the manner of provision, is changing.

5.3.3 Soft-applied basic unit: preparing for change

This basic unit has taken their planning for the Bologna Process seriously, organising a committee and various development teams to prepare for the upcoming changes. This means that they have trained their staff and discussed the changes with practical change in mind. The focus is to reorganise not only their curricula but also to revamp teaching methods.

They said in the interview that the reform process enjoys wide support from the staff. They also recognise that the need to change their curricula and teaching methods is influenced by changes in the Finnish schooling system. They need to reconsider the qualifications of the professionals they are training.

They also stated that the Bologna Process has caused much travel around Finland in order to participate in national education planning meetings, which may also be a positive thing because they now know more about the national situation in other higher education institutions.

5.3.4 Soft-pure basic units: changes caused by the reorganisation of departments

In soft-pure basic units in humanities nothing much has been done. They will do what is required in the next academic year. They also mentioned that departmental merger operations a couple of years ago have influenced them more than the Bologna Process. A basic unit in social sciences, in turn, has not made and will not make any major changes. Compulsory matters, such as the Bachelor's thesis, will be introduced because of the Bologna Process. The interview showed that they will also have to adjust to new rhetorical language and increase co-operation with other disciplines in the basic unit.

5.4 Internationalisation and the Bologna Process

One of the most important policy objectives of the Bologna Process is to promote international mobility among students and staff, and make degrees easily readable and comparable. International mobility can, therefore, be defined as one of the indicators of internationalisation.

On the basis of the interviews it is evident that internationalisation is normally understood and defined as student or staff mobility, or research co-operation with other higher education institutions. The Bologna Process has the potential to make student exchanges easier by increasing knowledge about the level and contents of courses in exchange institutions. The two cycles of degrees may also make it easier to define the required academic qualifications when accepting students to international Master degree programmes.

Internationalisation also provides a topic that makes the academics reflect on the nature and purpose of international co-operation, especially in national disciplines. National discipline refers here to a discipline (such as Finnish history) that focuses on research on national topics using the national language in their research and teaching. In these disciplines it is difficult to

see why they should try to establish international Master's programmes or hire non-native Finnish-speaking teachers.

As a conclusion it can be stated that academics do not see an increase in internationalisation, although the Bologna Process may have some impact on it. Academics in the basic units say that the Bologna Process may increase student mobility, even though the ERASMUS programme already increased student exchanges before the Bologna Process came into effect. Internationalisation in research depends, in turn, on personal contacts between academics. According to our interviews this has nothing to do with the Bologna Process.

5.5 Evaluation and quality assurance practices in the basic units

The Communiqué of the Berlin Conference states that “national quality assurance systems should include ... a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures...” We were interested in the use of evaluation in the basic units because of the Bologna Process, but also because evaluation is an interesting phenomenon in Finnish higher education. There is a strong, almost twenty-year tradition of using evaluation as a tool for development, whereas the concept of accreditation does not exist in the Finnish language. Self-evaluation is the most common evaluation instrument used in Finnish higher education institutions (Huusko 2004; Välimaa 2004). Our main concern is, firstly, how evaluation is utilised in the development of basic units during the Bologna Process; and secondly, how basic units define quality assurance.

A couple of general notions emerged on the basis of the interviews. First is the notion that all basic units have collected feedback from their students. Having said this, they also admitted that they do not have enough resources to analyse the feedback. In other words, student feedback is defined as evaluation. The second notion is related to the first one. Namely, that it is clear that no system for using the feedback to develop the departments exists, if and when an evaluation system is understood as a permanent way of collecting data, analysing it and drawing conclusions based on the data. In other words, there is no system of quality assurance in the basic units interviewed.

Concerning quality assurance, the definitions and understandings of the basic units varied a lot. On the one hand, there was discussion concerning the certification or accreditation of degrees (in a hard-applied discipline) and rational considerations of hard-pure discipline on how to take into account expectations in industry. On the other hand, however, there was total ignorance

of quality assurance as a concept in soft-pure disciplines. Rather than talking about quality assurance, the humanists referred to the academic level of a thesis as a sign of good quality in a basic unit. In social sciences they shared the same idea that the quality of theses indicates “real quality”, whereas quality assurance is defined as a liturgical entity with no connection to teaching development. This may indicate two things.

First, that there is a relationship between disciplines and society. In fields that have close interaction with the world of work, it is natural to think about the standards of degrees and their certification, also taking into account the qualifications required in working life. In disciplines that have more loosely defined connections to the labour market it is essential to concentrate on the academic quality of degrees and pay less attention to the quality of qualifications required in the labour market. Second, this state of affairs also reveals the dynamics of curriculum development in universities. In fields that have a vaguely defined relationship with society the internal development of the discipline concerned influences the curriculum development needs. Humanities provide a good example of this. In practical fields, where co-operation and interaction with society is a natural part of their functioning, it is easier to take into account changes in society and the labour market as a starting point for curriculum design. Sciences provide another example because they have a tradition of being sensitive to both disciplinary traditions and also to changes in society because many of their students will work in industry.

What about the relationship between the Bologna Process, the dynamics of curriculum development and quality assurance systems? It is evident that curriculum development in the spirit of the Bologna Process benefits the fields that have a close connection to the world of work. In these fields it is both easier to define qualifications required by working life and easier to consider them in the curricula. This process is also part of the quality assurance system in higher education institutions. In less practical fields the process of curricula development serves more academic objectives. In these disciplinary fields the standards of quality are predominantly academic, and are influenced by internal development within disciplines. Quality assurance in this context means ensuring the high academic quality of research, whereas in more practical disciplines, it means ensuring both the academic quality and the societal relevance of teaching and research.

5.6 The future of the Bologna Process

Our final theme in the interviews concerned the future of the Bologna Process: what will happen in the basic unit in relation to the Bologna Process?

The general feeling was that not much more would happen. They will continue doing what they have begun already: developing teaching, starting new Master's programmes and reflecting on quality issues. The basic problems will remain the same regardless of the Bologna Process: attracting good students and making them finish their studies in the proper time, achieving high-quality research and improving teaching. This will take place in the context of Finnish higher education policy-making, which rewards productivity and efficiency. In this context, the Bologna Process seems to be more of a challenge in adapting to new degree structures, rather than a challenge in improving the functioning of basic units.

Having analysed what has been said and done in the basic units, we should also reflect on what would have been done without the Bologna Process. Most interviewed groups of academics said that in any case they would have done most of the things that they have done so far for Bologna. The Bologna Process does provide, however, an outsider's perspective to changes in the basic units, as was emphasised in a hard-pure basic unit. For this reason, it also makes the academic staff take the processes of change more seriously. Thus, it seems that the Bologna Process has the potential to influence the functioning of the basic units because it challenges them to reflect on the contents of academic work.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 National policy problems related to the objectives defined in the Bologna Process

The differences in emphasis between the 'selling' of the Bologna Process and the outset of its implementation raises three problematic questions in Finnish higher education policy-making. Firstly, it seems clear that the implementation of the Bologna Process concerns adaptation more than any developmental challenge to the Finnish system of higher education. This argument is supported by the fact that the objectives of the Bologna Process were created outside Finland. This fact is rather important in the Finnish context because there is a general assumption that Finland has a rather well functioning national system of higher education (see e.g. Kankaala et al.

2004). Should Finland try to fix a well-functioning machine? The relationship between labour market and the new two-tier structure of degrees may prove to be problematic. It has been possible to get a Bachelors' degree in Finnish higher education for about 10 years.⁴ However, only 2,500 students finished a BA degree, when compared to 11,600 students who finished an MA degree in Finnish universities in 2001 (KOTA database). The interviews indicated that one problem with the two cycles of degrees is the fact that, as one academic put it, "in Britain the BA is a degree, whereas in Finland it is a stage in studies". In addition to these practical and psychological problems, there is the problem of the employability of BA degree holders. In Finland, there is no labour market for Bachelor's degrees. None of the interviewed groups of academics felt that employers would be interested in employing holders of BA degrees. Furthermore, both public and private sectors consider the Master degree as the 'basic degree'. The question remains then, as to whether the production (of Bachelors degrees) will create a demand (for Bachelors degrees) on the labour markets. Normally, the marketplace works the other way around. Therefore, one crucial question in this higher education policy-making experiment is this: will employers begin to favour holders of Bachelors' degrees over those holding a Masters degree?

The third problem is related to the objective of creating a national and European quality assurance system. The poor definition of quality assurance appearing on the website of the Ministry of Education is especially interesting. There is no reference in Finnish to quality or quality assurance. This poor formulation also reflects the fact that it is a sensitive issue because the Finnish idea of evaluation is based on the conviction that evaluation is an instrument for developing higher education. We have never had either a national idea of accreditation or a national agency to take care of accreditation in Finland (see Välimaa 2004).

The interviews strongly suggest that quality assurance is being understood as a way of systematically gathering and utilising student feedback. In the context of basic units, quality assurance is predominantly understood as a way of improving the (good or existing) quality of teaching. Research, administration and services are not included in this definition. As has been noted before (see Huusko and Saarinen 2003) the operationalisation of quality means student feedback at the level of basic units regardless of what

⁴ In fact, Bachelor's degrees were discontinued in the 1980s as one of the consequences of the Degrees Reform (see Välimaa 2005). In the 1980s, it was argued that the discontinuation of the BA would decrease the number of drop-outs because each student needs to finish a Master's degree before being able to enter the labour market. The argumentation in favour of the Bologna Process approaches the problem from the opposite direction.

the policy goals are at the upper levels of the national system of higher education. On the basis of the focus group interviews, it is also evident that no connection between the institutional and departmental quality assurance system is seen in the basic units. This is not only the result of the lack of such quality assurance systems in Finnish higher education institutions, it also indicates that quality assurance is absent as a topic in the Finnish higher education debate. This fact is supported by the national committee, which seems to aim to do as little harm as possible to the Finnish idea of evaluation based on the conviction that evaluation should be used as a tool for development. A national solution, therefore, is to begin to audit institutional quality assurance systems. The committee (and in this case the Ministry of Education) only states that higher education institutions should develop those systems themselves, it says nothing about how the quality assurance systems should function (OPM 2004).

6.2 Theoretical discussion

As Bleiklie et al. (2000) have noted the dynamics of higher education policymaking follow the rational of social fields of action rather than the top-down or bottom-up nature of processes. In each of the social fields the players struggle for what they define as important. As to the Bologna Process, quality assurance is one of the topics that is defined differently at various levels of the national higher education system. At the national level, it is essential to create a credible national system of quality assurance that fits well with the European systems of accreditation and quality assurance. The challenge is to meet European political challenges, whereas the basic units face the challenge of harmonising internal (academic) criteria with external challenges.

When explaining the changes caused by the Bologna Process one should also remember that there have not been massive reforms of degrees or curricula contents in Finnish universities for about 15 years. For this domestic reason, the Bologna Process may also be utilised for various purposes to reform both the contents and structures of curricula. A theoretically important notion is the fact that the Bologna Process seems to have an impact on the basic units that are in a suitable stage of their internal development. This refers to basic units that are in need of reform, whether it be a reform of structures or curricula content. The cause for this need seems to be insignificant. It may be the process of merging two or more departments into one (as was the case with two soft-pure basic units and one hard-applied basic unit), or it may be caused by the need to reform their curricula, which has been untouched for many years (as was the case with a soft-applied basic unit). The essential

factor seems to be that departments face an internal challenge to change. In this kind of social situation, an external impetus, such as the one caused by the Bologna Process, may have an impact on the basic unit. For the same reason, the departments that are doing well do not need external impetuses for change. These departments may, however, benefit from the Bologna Process because it provides an outsider's perspective to their functioning. As academics in the hard-pure basic unit stated, this outsiders lens may be useful for some basic units.

Theoretically, it is essential that all of the basic units have made their own interpretations and translations of the Bologna Process. This is in line with the theoretical assumptions suggested by Czarniawska and Sevón (1996). The nature of the translation is influenced in the first place by the discipline, as discussed above, because it represents various epistemic traditions, but also because it describes various relationships between a basic unit and society, represented in this case by qualifications of professionals in the labour market. The nature of the translation might also depend on the phase of the basic unit's internal development, as discussed above. Those departments that are in the phase of internal changes seem to be more willing to utilise external impetuses—such as the Bologna Process—to make changes in their curricula contents and structures. We do not suggest that this would be the case in all Finnish universities as an empirical generalisation. We do, however, suggest that this empirical notion should be considered in the context of the theory: is it really true that local conditions together with disciplinary cultures are crucially important in the process of translating reforms?

One should also ask whether the Bologna Process has changed the Finnish gradual reform strategy. The starting point for this question is provided by the fact the changes demanded by and through this process are caused by a “push from the above”. In this sense, Finnish higher education is challenged to adapt to the changes, leaving no real room to introduce the reform gradually. However, this argument is not very convincing because it is proposed that the implementation of the quality assurance system take place according to a gradual reform strategy. This provides, in turn, a national-level example of the process of translating the reform from the Bologna Process into Finnish higher education policy-making. What seems to be important with the Bologna Process is the implementation strategy based on national seminars and committees. These two matters indicate that the social field of Finnish higher education policymaking is based on the lack of hierarchical structure. The Ministry of Education attempts to gain as much support from as many actors as possible. It can not dictate the implementation of the Bologna Process; instead it needs to rely on negotiations between different actors.

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APPENDIX 1. THEMES FOR THE GROUP INTERVIEW

- Bologna Process
 - What is your impression of the Bologna Process?
 - What does the Bologna Process mean?
 - What are its central themes?
- Changes due to the Bologna Process
 - Have you made changes because of the Bologna Process? (to study programmes or structures, student selection, etc.)
 - Are you planning to carry out other changes before 1 August 2005?
 - Why these changes in particular?
- Curriculum Revision
 - Has there been a standard curriculum revision process in your subject?
 - What characterises this process?
- Effects of the Bologna Process
 - Have there been other effects regarding the Bologna Process in your department/subject?
 - Has it affected your evaluation practices or quality assurance? How?
- Department Evaluation Practices
 - What kinds of evaluation practices does your department use?
 - Has the Bologna Process changed your evaluation or quality assurance needs?
- Internationalisation
 - Is there a connection between the Bologna Process and the internationalisation of your department?
 - And to the recruitment or mobility of staff?
 - And to student mobility?
- The Future...
 - What do you see in the future regarding the Bologna Process?
- Other?
 - Are there other issues which are relevant to what we've been talking about—anything we didn't cover that we should have?