

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

**The Bologna Process and its
effects on the relations
between business and
higher education institutions**

Rede von

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Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

let me first thank the organizers of this seminar for the invitation and the opportunity to present the experiences the employers in Germany have so far regarding the implementation of the Bologna Process. During my presentation I would like to present some of our activities both during the time before the Bologna process started and since that time. In a second step I would like to talk about the reaction and activities of the employers concerning the Bologna process, including the expectations and demands regarding the competences graduates should have. At the end there will be some comments on the co-operation between the world of business and the Bologna process on the European level. But to start with I would like to give you an insight of the expectations the German employers have regarding the efforts and the activities of higher education institutions.

Universities and other forms of higher education institutions – such as university colleges – and the study courses offered by them have to fulfil several requirements. I just want to mention the most important ones and – of course – it is the point of view of the German employers regarding the situation in Germany. Since a long time ago German business requires a sort of modernization of the higher education system that relays on autonomy and competition. The targets are:

- a more practice oriented form of higher education, which teaches soft skills and competences as well as technical contents,
- a shortening of the real duration of the study time so that the graduates become more competitive on the national and international labour market,
- a more international oriented form of higher education; that means among others a phase of studying abroad and teaching lessons in a foreign language.

These expectations have nothing to do with the Bologna process and all the new structures combined with this initiative. Our institutionalised form of co-operation with the world of science is older than the discussion of the creation of a European Higher Education Area. On the national level we have founded a working group with round about 40 members. The half of them is nominated by us, so that representatives from several employers organisations as well as human resources managers are participating. The other half is nominated by the rectors conference; that means that rectors from different higher education institutions are members of our common working group. It is a good tradition that both sides nominate their representatives on their own.

In that working group we have a very open form of discussions; both sides are fully aware of the fact that we have some common interests and some differing ideas and expectations. So there is always the chance to prepare common position papers – which we have done several times on different issues such as further education by higher education institutions. But at the

same time the discussions and their results can be secret without spreading them outside the working group.

This creates a very important form of mutual trust and the opportunity to influence the discussion process on different issues both within the world of business and the world of higher education institutions. During the essential changes because of the Bologna process it was and is very valuable to have this working group. It was and is possible to prepare common activities and to bring together the both parties also on a regional and even on a local level.

Coming to the concrete activities the German employers have taken up so long I would like to mention the most important one: the position paper regarding the two tiered study structure, published in September 2003. You are right, that is four years after the Bologna process started officially – and five years after the Sorbonne declaration. So you might think, that’s pretty late and you might ask: Are the employers always so slow?? But to be honest: The first graduates with the new degree Bachelor leaved the higher education institutions in 2003. So there was no necessity to discuss this item in the world of business, at least inside the enterprises.

We as the Confederation of the German Employers Associations were the first ones who took the initiative and came with an extensive position paper. This was prepared by all our members and that means that the whole business in Germany supports the paper: all branches, from small to medium size enterprises as well as the global players we have in Germany.

With that we have a substantial position on the Bologna Process, the two-tiered study structure, and the expectations and demands employers have towards the higher education institutions. This position is still relevant today and helps a lot during all discussions both with politicians and representatives from higher education institutions. In the beginning there was a uncertainty regarding the question whether or not the labour market would accept the new degrees, especially the Bachelor. With our position paper we were able to show that the world of business welcomes the reforms and the new graduates.

Nevertheless some of the critic mentioned that our position paper is irrelevant because no enterprise had been involved. Just the employers organisations wouldn’t be enough to give a reliable position. But that’s not true! Since we discussed our position paper very intensely with all our members we could be and we are sure that all details were right. However it was obvious that we should send out another signal to all groups involved in the Bologna process, this time including the students.

That was the starting point for our next initiative, which we called “Bachelor welcome!”. We used our network we have inside different enterprises from different branches and were successfully in developing a round-table of more than 40 human resources managers. Together with

another organisation which we co-operate with very closely we prepared a declaration under the headline “Bachelor welcome!”

All human resources manager agreed upon to give a clear statement that graduates with Bachelor degree have the same opportunities for the starting of their career and the career paths as the graduates with the “old” degrees. Besides that the managers defined several demands regarding the quality and the content of the study courses. They published their paper in summer last year and the most important details are:

- Graduates with the Bachelor degree should have a broad professional basic knowledge and competencies.
- In addition to that it is necessary to teach cross-disciplinary qualifications which means methodological, social and personal competences. In the view of the employer a person with a Bachelor degree will only succeed on the labour market if subject-specific and cross-disciplinary education goals are equally followed and reached.
- There ought to be study-offers which could be studied besides an full-time employment.
- The international orientation of the courses is indispensable. This includes foreign language segments as well as the widest possible integration of foreign teachers.
- The professional world needs to be integrated in higher education in the largest possible extent. This does not only mean the completion of internships as regular parts of study programmes but also the inclusion of teachers with a professional background.
- Quality assurance starts when students enter the higher education institution. When changing to the two tier system, the quality of the study courses should be reviewed in its entirety. This includes an orientation towards the output as well as a review of the educational results.
- Quality assurance is best achieved through a system of external experts and peers combined with an internally developed quality culture.

These were the most important items the employers mentioned in the initiative “Bachelor welcome!”. We have presented them more detailed in our own position paper, published September 2003. So you can see that the employers associations gave exactly the opinion of the enterprises when they published the first paper.

Besides these more policy-oriented activities there are a lot more activities which are more practice oriented. I just want to mention two of them: the execution of conferences which we organize together with the German rectors conference. We called them “labour market and education market in dialogue”. Human resources manager and representatives of the higher education institutions are discussing different aspects regarding the Bologna process. During one of these seminars we presented some of the Bachelor-

graduates who talked about their career-paths – just to mention one example.

The other practice oriented activity was the execution of a competition which was organised by our initiative and financed through another organisation. In this competition we looked for the best new study course with the implementation of all aspects which are relevant for the labour market. It was astonishing that no university college was able to fulfil our requirements. Instead the best study courses were developed by universities – both in the humanities and the natural sciences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Up to now I tried to present some of our activities regarding the Bologna process and some of the aspects which are most important set from the employers point of view. Now I would like to explain a little more detailed what we mean by using the phrase “employability” and how we try to ensure that the quality assurance agencies take this aspect into account.

The term “employability” provides an enormous lively discussion, since it was taken up by the legislator as a goal of each study-programme. In particular universities have substantial difficulties to define this goal more detailed. In addition, in the context of the quality assurance there is a form of uncertainty, in which way the reaching of this goal can be evaluated reliably. Therefore the employers side created a catalogue of criteria, which we additionally provided with appropriate questions. With these questions it is possible to evaluate the study-offers concerning the aspect of reaching the goal employability. In order to illustrate, what kind of contents are meant concretely, the criteria as well as the questions are given in a short form:

Criterion	Set of questions
Definition of the vocational fields desired (in economics, science and administration)	Does it exist a description of the relevant vocational fields for this course of studies? How is the curriculum aligned for the students to arrange a capability for the typical work areas of the respective vocational fields?
Integration of practice during the conception and implementation of the course of studies	How were the vocational fields merged with the conception and implementation of the course of studies? Does it exist a program-council and how is this council set up? In which way are changes of the concept co-ordinated with the vocational fields?
Integration of practice in teachings and research	What kind of working-experience have the teaching staff? Are teachers from outside the higher education institution part of the teaching staff – on a regular basis? Are there case studies as a regular part of the study programme? Are research-projects co-ordinated with enterprises?
Practical experience of the students and graduates	How is it guaranteed that the students receive an insight of the relevant vocational field? Are internships obligatorily and how long do they last? Are credit points given for the internships?
Soft skills, such as: appropriate linguistic and written expression ability in English, team-competences, entrepreneurial thinking and acting, creativity and flexibility in the use of knowledge – and many others Soft skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appropriate linguistic and written expression ability in German - appropriate linguistic and written expression ability in English - team-competences - presentation and feedback-techniques - analytical ability - creativity and flexibility in the use of knowledge - entrepreneurial thinking and acting - intercultural understanding - ability to continuous learning 	Does exist a list of the soft skills, which are particularly promoted in the study-programme? How are the different soft skills taught? How is the reaching of this goal evaluated?

A strong motivation of the employers is, to have an intensive dialogue with the higher education institutions in order to secure the reaching of the common goals, that is: a high quality of the study offers and of the graduates. That does not mean to write the curricula for the universities – but to give crucial information about what kind of competences the graduates should have. Beyond that the employers see their responsibility in giving the universities the instruments to build up a transparent form of quality assurance.

Representatives of the enterprises should be appropriately represented (if possible to a third) in the accreditation council and in each accreditation agency (for example in the peer groups and in the decision commissions), in order to contribute with their expert's assessment that the criteria "practice orientation" and "employability" are taken into account.

The world of business expects a maximum of transparency regarding the study requirements and contents as well as regarding the competences taught in a course of studies. This form of transparency has to be guaranteed by the higher education institution. But transparency alone is not enough. We need also reliable comparability of the quality assurance procedures – not only in a national context but in a European context as well. Beyond that there is a need for a form of quality assurance regarding to the work of the agencies. The quality and the reliability of the quality assurance procedures are crucial for the acceptance of the whole process of quality assurance. Both the students and the labour market have an interest in getting information about the quality. Therefore it is keen that students as well as employers are involved in all procedures of quality assurance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The last two aspects – quality assurance and employability – are the most important arguments for our engagement on the European Level. As you may know already, UNICE – the employers organisation on the European level – has become a consultative member of the Bologna Follow up Group. This was one important step towards the acceptance of the employers as a “normal” partner within the Bologna process.

From our point of view it is not possible to create a European higher education area with new types of degrees, with a new study structure and with new contents of the study courses without the participation of the world of business. Most of the graduates are leaving the higher education institutions with a clear target: getting a job on the labour market. But even if they like to work as a scientist, as a researcher they need much more competences than just the technical ones.

The Confederation of the German Employers Associations took the initiative to prepare a European position paper regarding the Bologna process. We already have had our own and we knew that the second ministerial meeting after the Bologna declaration would be organized by the

German government. So we asked them whether or not it would be possible to participate in the ministerial meeting – and we succeed in having a workshop on the relevance of the employers involvement.

This was not only the starting point of a much more intense dialogue with the politicians on the national level. At the same time it was the beginning of an intense discussion-process among the employers on the European level. Most of the employer organisations in other European countries don't have the resources to deal with higher education policy. But regarding the Bologna process it was – and is – obvious that the employers had to come up with a position paper.

To make a long story short: After we took the initiative UNICE published its position paper in October last year. This was the prerequisite to ask for a more formalized participation within the Bologna process. And at last we were invited both to the ministerial conference in Bergen this year and becoming a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up-Group.

Now it is possible to have more influence on the implementation of the new study structure, the quality assurance procedures and showing the relevance of aspects such as employability and practice orientation.

At the same time – and that's why I present all this in a so detailed form – our participation on the national and the European level means that we are carrying our part of the responsibility. We fully support the main goals of the Bologna process – so we have a common interest that this process will succeed. But we are fully aware of that also the enterprises, the world of business have a certain responsibility. That means we ought to have a close, a flexible and a continuous co-operation with the higher education institutions.

With our experiences on the national level I can say that this might be a challenge – but it is worth all efforts. The higher education institutions are learning a lot about the expectations and the demands of the labour market, the students have the opportunity to study programmes which are relevant for the labour market and the enterprises are getting well educated graduates.

It is my hope that this seminar today could contribute to this target.

Thank you very much.