

# **CURRICULUM RESTRUCTURING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AFTER THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: A NEW PEDAGOGIC REGIME?**

*Berit Karseth\**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The landscape of higher education has changed dramatically in recent decades. Old demarcations have been broken down between traditional universities and other post secondary education institutions. New institutions, programmes and people have moved into the «higher education neighbourhood» and higher education is no longer dominated by the arts and sciences (cf. BRINT, 2002; GIBBONS *et al.*, 1994). Furthermore, the increased number of students, the manifold of tasks, and the intensified public, economic and political interests in educational issues, implies that contemporary higher education must be characterised by diversity rather than unity (NAIDOO & JAMIESON, 2005).

However, moving into the policy of curriculum restructuring on the national and international scenes we find an intense effort to develop a unified system that facilitates mobility, transparency and recognition of qualification from one educational setting to another. The main drive for these attempts in Europe is the so-called Bologna Process and its attempt to organise higher education within a more coherent and compatible European framework. Parallel activities are also going on by the European Union. In 2000, the European Council in Lisbon stated that the Union should become by 2010 «the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in

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\* Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo, Norway.

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the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.» This shows that debates and policy making processes with regard to higher education has emerged on a European level which calls for research that takes this activity into account.

By adopting the Bologna Process as the frame of reference, the aim of this article is to examine the ongoing processes of curriculum restructuring in Europe and discuss how this creates a new discourse that challenges the traditional curriculum discourses in higher education. The focus is mainly on higher education at an undergraduate level. Additionally, the question whether these changes produce a new pedagogic regime in higher education will be addressed. I will alternately analyse policy documents produced on the European scene and documents developed on the national level which describe the restructuring process in the higher education system of Norway.

The traditional curriculum discourses presented in this article are the disciplinary discourse and the vocational discourse. I use the term discourse to mean historically, socially and culturally specific bodies of meaning that constitute the meaning that events and experiences hold for social actors (cf. GEE, 2000). Furthermore, in line with Mills (1997) a discourse is viewed as a set of statements which occur within an institutional setting and which make sense because of an oppositional relation to other discourses.

## **I. PERSPECTIVES ON CURRICULUM**

Curricular questions are simultaneously raised at a macro, meso and micro level and there are many different stakeholders on the international, national and institutional scene taking part in the discourses. They represent contesting and conflicting perspectives which are important to visit in order to understand the implementation process of curriculum reforms.

In this article, the curriculum is viewed as a social construction where the process of decision-making is seen as a socio-political and cultural process (GOODSON, 2002; KARSETH, 2002; SLAUGHTER, 1997). Consequently, the curriculum policy is not a coherent policy - it represents conflicting arguments, which become visible when we analyse the discourses

represented in the policy documents. In other words, as Ian Westbury (2003: 194) puts it, «the term ‘curriculum’ must always be seen as symbolizing a loosely-coupled system of ideologies, symbols, discourses, organizational forms, mandates, and subject and classroom practices».

Curriculum as a field of study has not played a central role in the research literature on higher education in Europe (KARSETH, 1994; SQUIRES, 1987). However, as higher education institutions have expanded and become more complex, the planning process within these institutions, and therefore the management of the curriculum, has come to be seen as rather important among policy makers. In contrast, academics traditionally regarded the curriculum in higher education as internal, or even a private, matter.

Curriculum is more than the aims and the syllabus of education (cf. Squires 1987) and pedagogy includes more than the processes of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, there has been a tendency in the field of pedagogy to put a stronger emphasis on learning in recent years. This is an important move and represents a reaction against the strong effort at the beginning of the 1990s to define a canon of school subject (YOUNG, 1998). It is supported by researchers as well as politicians and has become a favorite concept in policy documents [BISTA, 2004, ST. MELD., 27 (2000-2001)]. However according to Gert Biesta (2004), the new language of learning allows for a redescription of the process of education in terms of economic transaction where the student is the consumer and the teacher or the institution is the provider). As Biesta points to, the new language which put emphasis on the needs of the learner make it almost impossible to ask questions about the content and purpose of education and, hence as I will argue challenges the established curriculum discourses in higher education.

## **II. THE TRADITIONAL CURRICULUM DISCOURSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

We may argue that higher education rests upon two main curriculum models: the *disciplinary model*, and the *vocational / professional model*. While the disciplinary model has been dominant in the university curriculum, although with important exceptions, the vocational model has been

traditionally linked to the college sector and undergraduate professional programmes.

### **II.1. The disciplinary discourse**

The underlying assumption of the disciplinary discourse is that education «should be an apprenticeship into powerful ways of knowing: of modes of analysis, of critique and of knowledge production» (ENSOR, 2004: 343). This discourse rests upon explicit, vertical pedagogic relations between teachers and students, with the rules of selection of curriculum content and of evaluation residing in the hands of the teachers (ibid). Following Basil Bernstein's well-known analytical framework, we may say that the disciplinary discourse has a strong framing; the pedagogy is explicit and visible in its regulation, and the transmitter (the teacher) has explicit control (BERNSTEIN, 1996: 27).

Furthermore, the importance of a disciplinary approach has been described extensively by Tony Becher (1989) in his inquiry of the linkages between academic cultures and disciplinary knowledge. Although his focus is on research and researchers, rather than on teaching and students, his contribution emphasises how the discipline works as a «socialisation agent» into academic life. Starting from Becher's theory, Oili-Helena Ylijoki (2000: 360) discusses the impact of the «moral order» of the disciplinary cultures on students' identity. With regard to the development of teaching and learning in university education, Ylijoki argues that quality assessment and development should assume different models in different fields, since there are no universal criteria for quality or any correct model for improvement of teaching. This argument follows what Paula Ensor calls an «introjective orientation», where academic productivity «derives from an inward focus upon the development of concepts, structures and modes of argument, rather than outwards upon the world» (ENSOR, 2004: 343).

The disciplinary curriculum model can be illustrated in the following way:

<b>Disciplinary curriculum</b>			
<b>Driving force: The knowledge production itself (cognitive legitimation)</b>			
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>Aims</b>
The disciplines situated in departments «Subjects» offered on foundational-, intermediate- and graduate level.	Disciplinary knowledge Emphasis on cognitive coherence	Subject-based teaching Vertical-pedagogic relations	Content-driven aims Mastery of conceptual structures, methods and modes of arguments

One example of policy statements following a disciplinary discourse can be drawn from a commissioned report on Norwegian higher education dated back to 1988 (NOU 1988:28). In the report the meaning of research based teaching on an undergraduate level is defined in the following way:

Teaching of this type of advanced knowledge has two significant characteristics. Firstly, it mainly transmits well-established knowledge within a discipline, often in the format of textbooks that condense and systematise results from previous research. ... Secondly, teaching at this basic level is characterised by the fact that students' own work mainly takes the form of exercises. ... Although these exercises mainly take the form of elaboration of well-established knowledge, this knowledge is anyway new to the student. The purpose of the exercises is partly that the students will master the core knowledge of the discipline, partly that they will be trained in scientific thinking and techniques (NOU 1988:28, p 89, my own translation).

As the quotation underlines, the main educational pillar is the knowledge structure of the discipline. The central aim is the apprenticeship into conceptual structures and modes of arguments. Hence, education implies a strong emphasis on students' acquisition of theoretical knowledge.

## **II.2. The vocational discourse**

Until the last decade, the Norwegian college sector consisted of separate professional schools with their own specific regulations and norms. It is

therefore problematic to argue that there is one dominant discourse across the different programmes. However, there are some similar characteristics found across the different undergraduate professional programmes. The discourse shaping the *vocational curriculum model* is enunciated by stakeholders who emphasise that education should be an apprenticeship into specific knowledge domains in order to develop specific skills relevant for specific professions. Joan Stark and Lisa R. Lattuca (1997) present a typology of professional field on some curriculum dimensions. They argue that all professional programmes are concerned with conceptual competence and technical competence. These competences indicate that students have learned the knowledge base and the technical skills needed to practice.

Although the connection to practical fields differs from programme to programme, the ability to meld concepts and skills in practice is emphasised. That is to say, an integrated approach to theory and practice is a hallmark of the discourse. The model can be presented in the following way:

<b>Vocational curriculum</b>			
<b>Driving force: The need of trained employees for human service, information and production (social legitimation)</b>			
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>Aims</b>
Unified cumulative programmes Regulated by national core curricula	Multi-disciplinary knowledge Emphasis on the integration of theory and practice	Teacher-based/ subject-based teaching Apprenticeship: Vertical-pedagogic relations	Vocational-driven aims Mastery of specific skills and a shared knowledge repertoire

In the Norwegian educational history, nursing education serves as an example that can be analysed within the vocational discourse (KARSETH, 2002: 126). Nursing education in Norway has a relatively long history and the first programme was established in 1868. For more than 50 years the schools of nursing education were the responsibility of private organisations and the schools were closely associated with the hospitals. In addition, the fact that the Nurse Association has had a strong grasp on the educational programme cannot be overlooked (MELBY, 1991). In the 1980s nursing

education became more like other educational programmes. However, while nursing education began to resemble other higher education programmes in significant ways, it is important to note the continuing relationship between this educational programme and the field of practice. Even today, half of the educational time focuses on practical studies outside the educational institution. Such a relatively strong vocational aspect of this programme is in sharp contrast to the liberal education programmes in the universities.

There are curricular arguments in the history of higher education which neither fit with a disciplinary nor a vocational discourse. Faculty members and students at the universities have contested the disciplinary discourse for almost half a century in the West. In the late 1960s and the 1970s alternative curricula emphasising interdisciplinarity and increased student involvement in curricular decisions were developed (JARNING, 1997). Educational programmes closely linked to social movements of the left (such as women's movement and civic rights movement in USA) were established within academia (SLAUGHTER, 1997). In that period the steering structure of the university was also altered in many European countries, which gave the students a significant position in the decision making process (JARNING, 1997). Additionally, in the college sector there have been voices among faculty members who strongly argue in favour of a *normative practical* discourse, claiming that education is a moral and ethical task, which builds on ideals as commitment to humanity, mercy and renunciation. The development of professional identity and ethics among students is strongly emphasised in this discourse (KARSETH, 2004).

However, the argument I would like to put forward is that the dominant discourses in higher education up to now can be characterised by the two models presented above. They mirror the traditional division of labour between the university and the college sector. While the main purpose of non-university institutions has been to offer a wide spectre of vocational education, either to qualify students for a specific occupation or to prepare them for a profession, the purpose of the university has been to provide education at a broader and more general academic level (KYVIK and SKODVIN, 2003). Nevertheless, this division of labour is now being challenged. The system of higher education in Norway as well as in many other countries in the western world has been undergoing changes, which moves higher education towards a more unified system. These changes we

may argue, have disturbed the sectoral demarcation and institutional identities and missions (SCOTT and WATSON, 1994: 13). As a result, the non-university sector seems to be adopting the central elements of the university culture. There has been an academic upgrading and growing scientification of professional programmes, but at the same time there has also been a strong voice supporting the emphasis on the vocational and practical aspect of higher education. John Pratt (1999: 261) makes a clear statement in this respect:

«In the historical context, the unification of higher education in 1992 could be seen as, simply, the most spectacular example of academic drift in British history; the polytechnics finally succumbed to the long-standing status hierarchy and became universities. But history is not as simple as that. Indeed, it was less that the polytechnics became universities than that the universities has become polytechnics».

### **III. THE DISCOURSE OF BOLOGNA: THE CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER DISCOURSE**

In this section I will demonstrate how the two discourses are challenged by a new discourse; the credit accumulation and transfer discourse.

Paul Trowler (1998: 8) argues that the origins of the credit framework and its underlying notion of assigning credit value to assessed learning stem from USA. He writes about how this system developed in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s emphasised access, flexibility, choice and efficiency. According to Trowler, the credit framework opens up higher education to become a 'mass' system. Additionally, the emphasis on individual choice undermines the traditional assumption that learning best takes place within one institution, within a fixed period of time defined by the academic staff.

Paula Ensor (2004) points to how the credit framework entered the policy scene in South Africa. She discusses the underlying argument behind the system, and labels it as the «credit exchange discourse» or «credit accumulation and transfer discourse». It has a projective orientation towards the global world, and it underlines the importance of students' choices. A key characteristic of the discourse is modularisation of the curriculum and

descriptions of modules in terms of outcomes that can be matched and exchanged as a part of a process of accumulating credit towards academic qualifications. According to its supporters, a restructuring of the curriculum corresponding with such an approach will move teaching from subject-based teaching to student-based teaching, where the teacher is a «facilitator rather than expert». Furthermore, the focus should be on competence or generic skills rather than knowledge or content. «In other words», Ensor continues, «the vertical pedagogic relations associated with academic apprenticeship into domain-specific knowledge favoured by a disciplinary discourse are to be eschewed» (ENSOR, 2004: 347).

A third aspect, which is the main point of departure in this article, is the arguments presented in the Bologna Process. In May 1998 the ministers in charge of higher education of France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany signed the Sorbonne Declaration on the «harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education System» at the Sorbonne University in Paris. The initiative was taken outside the EU framework, nevertheless by four central EU-members. This may be seen as the starting point of the so-called Bologna Process. The overall aim of the Bologna Declaration (1999) is the establishment of a European area of higher education by the end of this decade. Ministers from 29 countries signed it, and there have been follow-up meetings in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and the latest in Bergen (2005), where more than 40 ministers met. The Bologna Declaration, as it is stated, should not be seen as just a political statement, but a binding commitment to an action program. The Declaration is based on a clearly defined common goal: «to create a European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education» (The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation, 2000).

Through the Bologna Process action lines have been defined. The first six are described in the Bologna Declaration:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- Adoption of a system based on two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate)
- Establishment of system of credits

- Promotion of mobility for students and academic and administrative staff
- Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
- Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

The next three is stated in the Prague Communiqué:

- Lifelong learning
- Higher education institutions and students
- Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

And finally the tenth action line is defined in the Berlin Communiqué:

- Doctoral studies and the synergy between The European Higher Education and The European Research Area.

In the Berlin Communiqué (2003) the ministers also define three intermediate priorities for the following two years: quality assurance, the two-cycle degree system and recognition of degrees and periods of studies. According to the last priority, the ministers underline the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and it is stated in the communiqué that every student graduating from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. Furthermore, the ministers ask for the development of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Within such frameworks, degrees should have differently defined outcomes. Through the Berlin Communiqué (2003) the European ministers encourage the member states to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Consequently, there are intentions that both the content and procedures of the evaluation should be influenced by a European policy level.

There were no action lines added in the Communiqué at the last meeting in Bergen, but the document repeats and strengthens the importance of higher education as a public responsibility.

Building on the achievements so far in the Bologna Process, we wish to establish a European Higher Education Area based on the principles of quality and transparency. We must cherish our rich heritage and cultural diversity in contributing to a knowledge-based society. We commit ourselves to upholding the principle of public responsibility for higher education in the context of complex modern societies. As higher education is situated at the crossroads of research, education and innovation, it is also the key to Europe's competitiveness. As we move closer to 2010, we undertake to ensure that higher education institutions enjoy the necessary autonomy to implement the agreed reforms, and we recognise the need for sustainable funding of institutions (BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ, 2005: 5).

In the Bergen communiqué (2005: 2) it is stated that the ministers noted with satisfaction that the two-cycle degree system is being implemented on a large scale, but there are still some obstacles to access between cycles. Furthermore, «there is a need for greater dialogue, involving Governments, institutions and social partners, to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications, including in appropriate posts within the public service». The ministers are also concerned about the doctoral training and asked the Follow-up Group to be concerned about the further development of the basic principles for doctoral programmes. However, they emphasised, «Overregulation of doctoral programmes must be avoided» (BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ, 2005: 3).

The premise of the further process of restructuring can be summarized by the following quotation:

The European Higher Education Area is structured around three cycles, where each level has the function of preparing the student for the labour market, for further competence building and for active citizenship. The overarching framework for qualifications, the agreed set of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance and the recognition of degrees and periods of study are also key characteristics of the structure of the EHEA (BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ, 2005: 6)

The establishment of a compatible credit system is a central vehicle in order to obtain mobility (among students), employability and competitiveness. Despite critical comments among stakeholders within the Bologna Process, the common credit framework has been accepted.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is, according to the European Commission (2005:1), a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, objectives preferably specified in terms of the learning outcomes and competences to be acquired». A detailed checklist for the content of an Information Package /Course Catalogue is presented, which illustrates the effort of making a transparency and compatible system.

An illustration of a credit transfer model is presented below:

<b>Credit Accumulation and Transfer Curriculum</b>			
<b>Driving force: International mobility, employability, competitiveness and universal participation (social legitimation)</b>			
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>Aims</b>
Modules Credits	Multi-disciplinary knowledge Market relevance	Student-based teaching Provider- consumer relations	Competence driven aims (learning outcome) Generic/transferable skills

This credit transfer discourse is visible in the Norwegian state-commissioned report called *Freedom with Responsibility* (NOU, 2000:14). The report heavily emphasises the changing conditions of higher education. It points to internationalisation and argues that Norwegian higher education institutions must become more internationally oriented. According to report, it will no longer be sufficient to think in terms of national criteria. Increasingly keener international competition will impose new framework conditions on the profiling of fields within teaching and research. Higher education should, the report argues, aspire to make Norwegian universities and colleges internationally sought-after places for study and work.

The arguments in the report support an increased flexibility of the Norwegian system, which implies students' freedom to select studies and mobility between the institutions. The committee concluded that the current challenges are so extensive that they have to be met by a new and common degree structure, with common designations for the various degree levels. For

programmes at colleges, this restructuring would result in improved arrangements for continuous studies leading to higher degrees.

The report also emphasises that major social changes and changes in students' expectations challenge the educational institutions and the established policy of higher education and research. Educational institutions cooperate closely with the spheres of working and civic life, and must also fulfil their role as a spearhead in the development of competence.

The 2000 report was followed up by a White paper (St.meld. nr. 27, 2000-2001) entitled «Do Your Duty- Demand Your Rights» which is one of the main documents behind the reform in higher education in Norway. In addition to fulfilling the aims of the Bologna Declaration of a new degree structure, and the implementation of a European credit transfer system, the White paper underlines the need for a changing pedagogy in higher education, and it argues that «Priority is to be given to a combination of teaching methods involving a high level of student activity, new forms of assessment and regular feedback that promotes learning». An important goal changing the pedagogy is to get more students to complete their studies and produce credits.

By analysing these policy documents, we see that both the disciplinary discourse and the vocational discourse are being confronted by a credit accumulation and transfer discourse advocating global competition and European cooperation. As mentioned, modularisation is a key characteristic. Its function is to disaggregate traditional extended higher education courses; the specification of outcomes allows modules to be evaluated against each other for the purpose of equivalence. Ensor (2004) argues that the specification of learning outcomes in the credit exchange discourse is not first of all an effort to address issues of quality. It is an attempt to provide mechanism to facilitate the circulation of knowledge in an organised framework.

#### **IV. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW CURRICULUM MODEL**

An interesting point of departure in order to capture the realization of the Bologna process is the *Trends* reports (I - IV). While the first two reports are

concerned about the realization of the main objects (employability, mobility and competitiveness or attractiveness of European Higher Education) on a more general level, the Trends III and Trends IV give an account on a more concrete level.

In Trends II the authors conclude that there has been a strong consensus on the core objects of the process aiming at free mobility, employability and international competitiveness or attractiveness of European higher education (Trends II, 2001). When it comes to the third core object: the need for European Higher Education to become more attractive or competitive, the authors argue that the data reflect a remarkable increase of awareness of what is at stake. In stressing the need for European Higher Education to compete for its place in the world, the declaration has, the authors argue, played a major role. However, they continue, the countries show limited awareness and little concern about European universities seeking U.S accreditation or the proposed inclusion of certain aspects of education into WTO negotiations.

One reason for this, in my opinion, is that the conceptions of competitiveness and trade are too far away from the traditional discourses about higher education in Europe. One example of this is the statement below made by the Nordic University Association in august 2002:

The process must respect the autonomy of the universities. The Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988 stated that university research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power to meet the needs of the outside world. This is even more relevant now, the institutions constantly being exposed to pressure for immediately useful contributions (NUS, 2002)

This statement represents another language and another discourse about the aim of higher education. The Bologna process, according to the Association «must be one of recognition, not one of harmonization; *a process of convergence, not of uniformity*».

Another example of a critical concern was presented by the Chairman of the Committee for Higher Education and Research in the Council of Europe, Per Nyborg at a UNESCO - CEPES/EUA Conference in march 2003, where he stresses higher education as a *Public Good* and a *Public Responsibility*

and argues that «the right to education is a human right, and that higher education is a cultural and scientific asset for both individuals and society». «Public responsibility», he goes on, «is a precondition for a national system of higher education» (NYBORG, 2003: 1)

Looking into the Berlin Communiqué (2003), we find a similar emphasis on public responsibility of higher education. At the same time there is also a strong recognition of the marketisation of higher education:

«Ministers reaffirm the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process. The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level. In that context, Ministers reaffirm their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility. They emphasise that in international academic cooperation and exchanges, academic values should prevail. Ministers take into due consideration the conclusions of the European Councils in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002) aimed at making Europe «the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion» and calling for further action and closer co-operation in the context of the Bologna Process» (BERLIN COMMUNIQUÉ, 2003: 1-2).

To conclude, the Bologna Process is neither a linear nor a fixed process. It is shaped by different stakeholders who uphold different agendas. The social dimension of higher education was not explicitly emphasised in the beginning of the process, but has become a central issue in the ongoing debate.

The primary aim of the last report, Trends IV (2005: 4), is to shed light on the conditions, problems, challenges encountered and achievements made by European's higher education institutions in implementing the Bologna Reform (p. 8). The report is based on field research with 62 site visits to higher education institutions, and according to its own summary, Trends IV «provides an in-depth and the most up-to-date snapshot of the state of implementation of Bologna Reforms in Europe's universities».

The report states that almost all the countries investigated (29 countries) have introduced the two-cycle system and that the situation is remarkably different from two or three years ago (p. 11). Furthermore a majority of the

institutions visited declared that they have implemented ECTS and use it for both accumulation and transfer and a majority of the institutions in their reports proclaim that a Diploma Supplement will be issued to every graduate by the end of 2005 (p.22). In the Berlin Communiqué (2003) the ministers argue that these two elements, ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, are the main tools to increase mobility among students and teachers. Although the use of ECTS is widespread, there are some remaining problems, «in particular concerning how to assign credits to courses by assessing properly student workload» (p. 24), the report maintains. According to the Diploma Supplement, the greatest challenge for implementing is the inclusion of learning outcomes. This, the report argues, is the essential component to provide information on the knowledge, skills and competences of the award holder (p. 25).

The report partly describes the Bologna Process as a curriculum reform and it puts forward two aspects: modularisation and the concept of learning outcome. Modularisation is a concept for which no European reference documents exist, the report maintains (ibid. p. 15). However, a large number of the institutions argue that the programmes have been or are presently being modularised. A significant number of the institutions in the sample declare themselves familiar with the concept of learning outcomes (or competences) and have or will implement them as a helpful tool. However, for a number of institutions, the report maintains, only vague notions of learning outcomes exist.

The report argues that there is a «pedagogical shift intended by the Bologna process» (p. 18) and «In the large majority of HEIs visited for *Trends IV* staff supported the underlying ideas of a student-centered approach and problem-based learning, even if they were critical of the various features of the implementation process» (p. 11).

The emphasis on a pedagogical shift is difficult to trace back to the Bologna declaration. Pedagogical issues related to the processes of teaching and learning is not a topic in the declaration. The word pedagogical or pedagogic is not used. This holds also true for texts from the meetings in Prague, Berlin and Bergen. However, when reporting empirical data conducted on institutional and programme level (as the *Trends IV* report does), issues concerning teaching and learning become central.

When it comes to the implementation of decisions of the Bologna Process, Norway can be characterised as the «brightest boy in the class» («den flinkeste gutten i klassen») (Nyborg 2004). The degree structure based on *two main cycles* is adopted and only a very limited number of programmes are exempt from the 3+2 model. In 2001, a new *system of credits*, in which a full academic year corresponds to 60 credits, was introduced. It replaced the former system consisting of 20 credits a year. The new system was accompanied by a new standardised grading scale (descending from A to E for different pass grades and F for fail). Both are equivalent to *ECTS* arrangements. The *Diploma Supplement* was introduced in 2002, and higher education institutions are obliged to issue the Supplement to all students on request. The *Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)* was established in 2002. It is regarded as an independent government body and began its work in January 2003. Its role is to supervise and develop the quality of higher education in Norway through evaluation, accreditation and recognition of institutions and course provision. The national reform of *lifelong learning* (the 2001 Competence Reform) enabled all higher education institutions to admit students aged 25 or above without formal entrance qualifications, in addition to those who passed normal national selection procedures. The Reform also provides criteria for assessment of a combination of formal, informal and non-formal learning (EURYDICE, 2003/04: 54).

One peephole to get hold on the reform implementation on an institutional level is to analyse strategic policy documents of higher education institutions. The following example is from the University of Oslo<sup>1</sup>. I will use a draft version of the strategy plan (NOTAT, 2004) developed at the University by a project group appointed by the university senate and the final version (STRATEGISK PLAN UiO, 2005). The draft is a result of discussions with central actors within the university (deans and faculty, committees of the university senate) and external stakeholders

It is stated in the draft document that the institutional profile of the university and the main premise on which to define its societal mandate is to be a *research university*. It is stated that this means allocation of more

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Oslo founded in 1811, is Norway's largest and oldest university and it has approx. 30,000 students and 4,600 employees.

recourses to research in order to strengthen the research function. It is also stated that if the quality of the research is not good enough, the support should be reduced or even withdrawn, even if the field is attractive for students.

The profile of education is based on a strong integration between research and education. The project group proposes that the university should change its focus from the learning environment to the learning outcome. The emphasis should be on the quality of the outcome and students competence. Requests from different stakeholders alone are not valid criteria for offering an educational programme. Rather, it is the research competence of the academic staff that is the basic criteria. Student mobility is not a main issue in the document; there is no emphasis on students' choice, flexibility or multi-disciplinary programmes. Furthermore, there is an argument in the document for a stronger focus on the graduate level than the undergraduate level. The document can be read as a correction of the result of the Norwegian Quality reform. The implementation of the reform seems to have created an «imbalance» between institutional norms and values («the institutional saga») and the norms and values of the reform. Although more systematic analysis is needed, my tentative conclusion is that the document uses arguments that fit well within a disciplinary discourse. There is an awareness about the development of a European space of higher education and the importance of mobility and employability (pp.20-21), but research-based teaching is described in a rather traditional way.

There is, however, one important change from earlier documents, which is the stronger emphasis on competition. There is a market argument behind the text; it is through excellent research that the University of Oslo will get its position in an international higher education market.

The European Credit Transfer system is not mentioned in the two documents. It is, however, rather visible when moving towards the level of educational practice. The production of credits has become essential for the students and the academic and administrative leadership of the institution, but it does not fit with the rhetoric of the university. The Norwegian grading scale is in compliance with the European Credit Transfer system, but it differs from the ECTS system in that it is qualitative, rather than quantitative. The distribution of awarded grades from a large number of exams within a

time period of 3-5 years is still expected to match the quantitative distribution applied in the ECTS scale (UiO, 2005). The credit system at the University of Oslo is described on the webpage (*ibid.*). Studies are organised through courses which are freestanding units with a credit value that normally varies between 5 and 20 ECTS credits. A course group is a group of courses defined as constituting an academic unit. The programmes of study may have course groups of varying extent. Course groups of 40 or 80 ECTS credits are the most common. One year of study following the prescribed time schedule should give 60 ECTS credits. All courses at the University of Oslo have their own codes consisting of letters and numbers. The letter reflects the subject while the number reflects the level.

The outline of the credit system shows that the university curriculum is regulated through a common framework. Although we holds on to the university ideals of unity between research and teaching, academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge for its own, the educational enterprise is more controlled than academics like to believe.

## **V. DISCUSSION**

Within a credit accumulation and transfer discourse the students are portrayed as active partners participating in horizontal pedagogic relations where the students' own choices and interests play a major role. However I will argue that the consequences of the ongoing curriculum restructuring and the findings presented in the Trends IV report place the student in a rather different position. The new management of curriculum (the content and the pedagogy) has, as I will argue, also changed the balance between professional administrators and academics on the national as well the international scene (see KOGAN *et al.*, 1994).

### **V.1. Curriculum reform: Universality, certainty and transparency**

My analysis in this article indicates that moving beyond the rhetoric of creating a European space for higher education aiming at mobility and flexibility among students and teachers, the demands decided upon in the Bologna Process represent a curricular standardisation, whereby the

management of credit transfer and accumulation becomes the salient task. The aim is to develop a highly reliable space of higher education which is manageable and predictable; the flexibility has to be regulated. On the one hand, we may argue that it seems that a paradox has been created that in our time when the society is described as complex, plural and uncertain, the Bologna Process stresses unification and simplicity. On the other hand, the Bologna decisions can be analysed as an attempt to manage the complexity and uncertainty. What we read in the Trends IV (2005) is that the institutions have not developed the necessary management tools yet. These includes standardised modules (defining the size and format of modules across the institutions), strategic plans for curricular development, qualifications framework, clear definitions of students work load, additional guidance and counselling service for the students.

However, the critique of the standardization is advocated by academics in the Trends report. It shows that the reform has not resulted in increased flexibility, but increased rigidity.

Academics in many countries expressed concern about the negative effects brought about by the focus on teaching (as opposed to student learning) in the Bologna process, especially at the Bachelor level, with language such as «*Verschulung*,» «*Didatticizzazione*» being used. The primary worries are that curricula are becoming more rigid and compressed with less space for creativity and innovation, and in this respect there were frequent complaints that too many units of former longer degrees were being crammed into first-cycle programmes (TRENDS IV: 11-12).

The new forms of curriculum management of higher education put forward by the Bologna process represent values and visions that do not correspond with the traditional discourses described above. In the disciplinary discourse it is the teachers through their formal research qualification who should be in charge of the content and pedagogy of the programme. It is based on an ex post system of assessment where «academics are trusted to determine their own objectives and ways of meeting them» (KOGAN *et al.*, 1994: 25). An assessment system through accountability and audit will therefore appear an «enemy» of the discourse.

According to the Ministry, the establishment of NOKUT (The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) and improved quality assurance

at the institutional level mirror the objectives of the Bologna Process (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). By establishing NOKUT Norway turned into a new and different quality assurance system in higher education on a national basis, with its emphasis on evaluations of institutions' systems for quality assurance and accreditation of institutions, courses and programmes. Although it is expressed that an important task of NOKUT is to motivate and support the institutions in their work for enhancing the quality on their provisions, the new system means a shift from emphasis on quality development to quality control (HAUGLAND, 2004). It is stated that NOKUT is «fundamentally independent of both political authorities and the higher education institutions and has the purpose of representing society's interests in safeguarding the quality of higher education» (NOKUT, 2004: 3). To be fundamentally independent is of course not possible, but what is more important is that it illustrates that the boundaries between political authorities and academic actors have become blurred. Instead of characterising NOKUT as an independent organisation it can be seen as an intermediating organisation that brings together bureaucrats and academics in a new network to work on educational issues, which have impact on further policy making in the field of higher education (cf. SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

In other words, the curricular reform influences the role of the university teacher in ways that are experienced by many teachers as quite fundamental. Teaching is not any longer «privately owned.» An increased focus on quality and accountability makes teaching an object of evaluation by the teacher her/himself as well as by others (students, external evaluators).

## **V.2. The role of the student: Towards a regulated consumer?**

The core issue addressed in the Norwegian white paper «Do your Duty - Demand your Rights» (ST.MELD. 27, 2000-2001) is formulated as «students will be given increased rights both in relation to the quality of courses and the financing of studies. This will entail clearer obligations on the part of the students as regards progress and completion of studies».

And the report states that «Priority is to be given to a combination of teaching methods involving a high level of student activity, new forms of assessment and regular feedback that promotes learning». With reference to

the White paper and the follow-up report from the committee of the Parliament (Inst. S. nr 337 2000-2001), it is obvious that there is an increased interference from the policy level in pedagogical issues in Norwegian higher education. In the report from the committee we can read that the reform must lead to pedagogical changes and move the focus from exams and teaching in auditorium to learning and student feedback throughout the educational programme (pp.16-17). As mentioned, pedagogical issues seem to have become more central to the Bologna Process and can no longer be understood as internal affairs.

The international and national policy documents ask for a pedagogical shift towards a student-centred learning approach viewing the student as an active responsible participant. However, this may not be what is going on in practice as the Trends IV report points to:

Moreover, academics and students often reported that time for independent research or study, critical reflection, fostering of an independent mind had been reduced in the new, significantly more compressed programmes in which the new form of continuous assessment was reported to develop greater efficiency and delivery. The additional teaching and exam burden that often accompanies the new curricular regime also leaves less time for teachers to look after small research projects (since most institutions had no additional resources to hire new staff). Only a handful of institutions mentioned an explicit policy to actually emphasise research and independent study at Bachelor level (TRENDS IV, 2005: 34).

And it continues:

Whatever the cause, some academics and students fear that the compressed nature of new programmes does not allow enough time to develop a critical and reflective approach to the materials presented and generally does not foster an independent mind. There were frequent comments that efficiency, time management and completion in due time are now playing a greater role than before, while academic curiosity and intellectual development have become less important. Some were also worried that part time studies, which is a mode of study required by many contemporary students, was being made significantly more difficult to manage in the new regime (*ibid.* p. 47)

I will argue that while there at the moment is a strong focus on the individual learner, the focus is based on the student as a consumer or a user of the higher education system rather than a participator. The curriculum restructuring has developed consumerist mechanisms which on the surface seems to offers students greater choice and control over their learning. Compared to the traditional curriculum models in higher education, this implies an outward orientation where student as a potential consumer is placed in the centre. This new discourse place learning at the front (cf. BISTA, 2004) by advocating student-based learning and a 'learner-centred' curriculum. Moreover, its supporters create a picture of the oppositional curriculum model as elite oriented, hierarchical, and with limited relevance to students' interests and requirements asked for in the labour market. However, as Rajani Naidoo (2002) points to, a consumer mentality in students may result in a loss of responsibility for their learning, little tolerance for the expansion of study beyond the routine of the predictable and consequently affect their disposition and motivation towards lifelong learning.

While the importance attached to students' needs and interests in the policy documents seems to be in agreement with the social theory emphasising individuals' freedom and capacity to frame and direct their own circumstances (cf. GIDDENS, 1991), the Bologna Process can be read as a rational programme that tends to create a discourse for the governing of the self in light of the objectives *already set*.

### **V.3. Conclusions**

As shown in this article, there is a curricular restructuring going on in European higher education. The traditional curriculum discourses (vocational and disciplinary) are challenged by a discourse which emphasises flexibility, employability and mobility within a European market. It also calls for the development of a European qualification framework that is applicable on an institutional, national and international level. In the Berlin communiqué the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance is being stressed. At the same time, the document underlines the principle of institutional autonomy and argues that the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself.

Although the rhetoric calls attention to the institutional autonomy, the quality assurance system together with the aim of a qualification framework reflect a management model of governance which values competence in managing people and finance, accountability and evaluation. Traditionally a management model has been prevalent in institutions where the state power has been exercised directly as for instance in vocational education (Kogan et al. 1994). However, and moving the model from the national to the European scene, it becomes obvious that «managerialism» is an important feature of the Bologna Process.

The standardisation of higher education can be seen as an attempt to manage uncertainty and to create a predictable system and the ongoing curriculum restructuring presents a pedagogic regime which alters the regimes created by what I have labelled the disciplinary and the vocational discourse. Standardisation is an important aspect of the new regime in order to manage a European higher education system that emphasises universal participation as well as employability, mobility and competitiveness.

However, higher education should be an arena for discussion, engagement and commitment, where students are urged to get involved. It seems reasonable to argue that neither the traditional curriculum discourses nor the credit accumulation and transfer discourse ask for higher education institutions which offer a home for conflicting positions and critical dialogues (cf. BARNETT, 2003). To educate towards critical citizenship implies a discourse that praises critical disagreement as well as critical reflection and calls for the capacity to be open to multiple understandings and to engage, though critically, with them. According to Gerard Delanty (2001), the university has to take a critical and hermeneutic role in the orientation of cultural models and thereby be capable of giving society a cultural direction. By the concepts of cultural citizenship and technical citizenship, Delanty contributes to the discursive landscape of how to describe the identity of today's higher education.

As stated earlier, curriculum making is not a linear process. Changes at one level have consequences for other levels, which go beyond those that are intended. This calls for a greater sensitivity when it comes to issues related to analysing curriculum change. The view of the curriculum as a cultural and social construction serves as a reminder.

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**RESUMEN**

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Tras adoptar el proceso de Bolonia como punto de referencia, este artículo se encarga de analizar la corriente política de reestructuración de currículos en educación superior. El análisis se basa en documentos producidos en el ámbito europeo, algunos dedicados al estudio del proceso de reestructuración de la educación superior en Noruega. El artículo muestra cómo el nuevo discurso presentado por el proceso de Bolonia, pone en entredicho los discursos tradicionales en educación superior en referencia al currículo. La acumulación y transferencia de créditos necesitan moverse en un marco más actual, que realce la movilidad, empleabilidad y competitividad. Aunque la retórica pueda ser importante en términos de autonomía institucional, la reestructuración curricular representa una estandarización a nivel de Educación Superior, por la cual la transferencia y acumulación de créditos se convierte en una tarea saliente. El objetivo es desarrollar un espacio fiable para la educación superior que sea manejable y predecible. Aunque se abogue por un tratamiento flexible del currículo y una pedagogía centrada en el estudiante, el proceso de Bolonia puede ser contemplado como un programa racional que tiende a crear un discurso propio para el control estudiantil, basado en objetivos fijados con anterioridad.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Análisis del discurso. Teorías del currículum. Discursos curriculares. Reestructuración curricular. El Proceso de Bolonia. Sistema Europeo de Transferencia de Créditos (ECTS). Empleabilidad. Competitividad. Noruega.

**ABSTRACT**

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By adopting the Bologna Process as the frame of reference this article discusses the ongoing policy of curriculum restructuring in higher education. The analysis is based on policy documents produced on the European scene and documents which describe the restructuring process in the higher education system of Norway. The article shows how the new discourse presented by the Bologna Process challenges the traditional curriculum discourses in higher education. The credit accumulation and transfer

discourse asks for a curricular framework which enhances mobility, employability and competitiveness. Although the rhetoric calls attention to institutional autonomy the curriculum restructuring represents a standardisation of higher education whereby the management of credit transfer and accumulation becomes the salient task. The aim is to develop a highly reliable space of higher education which is manageable and predictable. Although a flexible curriculum approach together with a student-centred pedagogy are advocated, the Bologna Process can be read as a rational programme that tends to create a discourse for the governing of the student (the self) in light of the objectives *already set*.

**KEY WORDS:** Discourse Analysis. Curriculum Theory. Curriculum Restructuring. Curriculum Discourses. Bologna Process. ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). Employability. Competitiveness. Norway.