

Student mobility and programme development within the ELLS network.

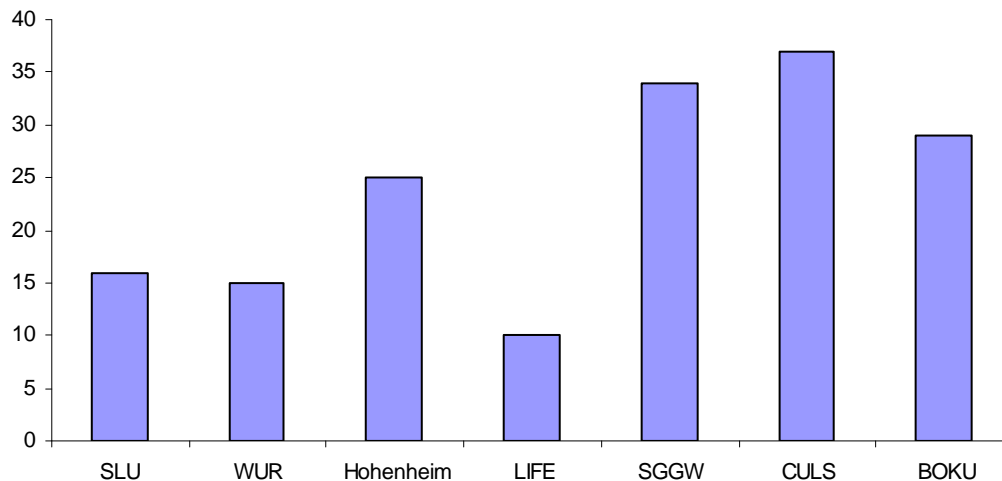
Workshop report from the annual Euroleague for Life Sciences, ELLS, conference in Copenhagen 11th November 2011.

Background

In connection to the annual ELLS conference a number of experts from all member universities were invited to participate in a workshop on student mobility and programme development. The aim of the workshop was to intensify the cooperation between the ELLS universities in student mobility and curriculum development by recognizing limiting and facilitating factors.

In the academic year 2009/2010 166 students were involved in exchange between the member universities.

outgoing students 2009/2010



Methodology

In order to have a productive workshop, information on limiting and facilitating factors of curriculum development were gathered before the conference. The information was gathered in the form of answers to a questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided between undergraduate and post-graduate education with focus on the administrative process as well as the curriculum development. The questionnaire was sent to all member universities that had the task of summarizing the information from all participating persons (IRO's, Subject area members, TF and invited experts).

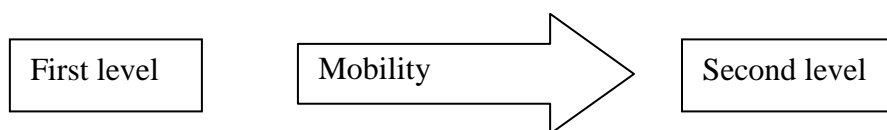
During the workshop a SWOT like- analysis was used. SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats to identify areas for development. In the workshops the issues limiting and facilitating factors were used.

The workshop was divided into two sessions. The first session was based on the composition of the expertise groups, i.e. the administrative process experts (divided into admission, graduation and curriculum coordination), and curriculum development experts (divided into faculty/university level and study programme level). The second session consisted of cross-reference groups, where the university experts from the different groups were mixed.

Introductory statements

The goals of mobility and the aim of the process need to be clearly defined in internationalization policies. Unless it is a joint effort on all levels mobility cannot be achieved in terms of both quality and high mobility numbers. Therefore policies should be implemented so that mobility is easily accessed for students and staff, and is an integrated part of the learning outcomes.

The Bologna model was implemented in most universities after 2007. One of the main ideas of the system was that mobility should be facilitated and that it should occur between the different study levels.



Unfortunately the evidence shows that the Bologna model has not facilitated the mobility in terms of student mobility within exchange programmes, for example the Erasmus programme.

At most universities the first cycle education is held in national language and education on second and third cycle is held in English. One introductory statement says that all students should have the possibility to spend a semester abroad. This should be done without the students having to postpone their degree.

Financial issues and the labor market also influence students of finishing their first cycle studies in three years.

Workshop outcomes

Even if the Bologna model with its 3+2+3 model has been implemented in most European countries, the European universities still have **different academic calendars**. The difference in semester schedules is clearly a limiting factor for student mobility. To come to terms with problems of different academic calendars a solution with block courses could be suggested or that students are recommended to participate in mobility during the full academic year instead of mobility during just one semester. The existence of a wide variety of e-learning courses can also be a solution for students wanting to participate in mobility between institutions where the academic calendar is not conformed. The difference in academic calendar also creates problems for the students if they spend the last semester abroad. It can mean a difference in

receiving their diploma in spring or fall. Students also need to be ensured of full recognition of credits and especially in terms of compulsory courses.

Another issue that was discussed was **marketing**. Information about what the different ELLS universities have to offer is not reaching the majority of students within the network. Clear information on what the different ELLS institutions are providing should be easily accessible on the web and visibility to ELLS' summer courses should be given priority. Participation in ELLS summer schools can promote longer mobility to students, hence priority should be given in both offering summer schools within different academic fields as well as facilitating participation for students.

The commitment and **motivation of staff** is also attached to this issue. The staff at the different member universities needs to be informed about research areas and excellence among the other partners. This could easily be facilitated by staff mobility and increased joint projects as well as further cooperation in terms of external censors for examinations between ELLS partners. A suggestion arose that an ELLS programme of external examiners could be established. In which academic staff from ELLS universities would function as external examiners at the partner universities. The aim being that it would hopefully develop confidence in the abilities and academic level of both students and academic staff members at ELLS partners and by implication enhance their willingness to promote mobility between ELLS partners. The commitment of the staff is crucial and teachers need strong incentives to teach in English instead of the native language. They cannot be forced and therefore the challenge of the ELLS institutions will be how to get them on board.

A clearly defined problem that hinders mobility is **language**. If the first level (BSc) education is held in the native language a very limited number of BSc-students can participate in mobility. Therefore some education in English on first level is necessary. The solution suggested is to have the ELLS institutions offer a third year of the first level education in English. But the lack of exiting courses in English on first level is not the only problem connected with language. Both students from southern European countries that are mobile within the Erasmus programme and students for the second level (MSc) full programmes coming from non-EU countries are lacking sufficient knowledge of English.

To enable mobility effort should be put on increasing joint projects/joint programmes. Hence the **administrative support** needs to be easily accessed for subject areas and other initiatives. A standardized text for Diploma supplements should be created and easily accessed from the ELLS webpage or from IRO's. As the strategy at the European Commission for Education and Training tends to move in the direction of joint degrees being desirable, a manual for creating and implementing joint degrees should be created. Within ELLS the Enveuro programme can work as a best practice model and the manual for the programme should be sent to all ELLS members.

Flexibility is one of the key words in the workshop outcomes. But how do institutions manage to be flexible in the administration of student mobility and still follow national legislations? In some areas the institutions can clearly have more possibilities for flexibility than within others. The institutions can make a conscious offer to plan for more education in English on first level, to offer incentives to faculties and personnel to create more summer courses given in English and to harmonize exams and make them flexible in time. The introduction of mobility windows in connection to intensive courses taught in English with

full credit transfer would facilitate mobility in one aspect but would meet problems in the different academic calendars and in finding affordable accommodation. The recognition of the ELLS partners and credit transfer could also be facilitated.

Suggestions

1) Student mobility:

Mobility is an added value for both students and teaching staff.

Topics to be improved within ELLS:

- Increase visibility of ELLS to show the attractiveness of the network
- Develop semester packages showing the “uniqueness” of each ELLS university
- Consider establishing mobility windows
- Describe language requirements (do not think of English only)
- Establish a social network for students

2) Promote curricula development:

- Increase commitment and motivation of staff
E.g. by staff mobility (also for exams, evaluation activities etc., not only for teaching/research)
or by establishing evaluation regulations within each university that focus on international activities of staff/departments so that internationalisation brings benefits to staff and departments
- Improve English skills of teaching staff
- Start with summer schools
- Be flexible
- Create mobility windows

3) Administrative issues:

- The ELLS QA group should check the Diploma supplements issued in joint curricula and recommend standard ELLS text to be used in certain parts of the DS.
- The ELLS IRO group should update the IRO manual by including joint degree regulations in different countries/universities.
- ELLS could consider digital transfer of transcripts of records etc.
- Administrative staff exchange should be increased.