

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Key to Employability and International Cooperation

Dr. Guy Haug

President of the Advisory Board of
the UOC International Graduate Institute
European expert in higher education systems,
and university assessment and development

<http://www.uoc.edu/inaugural11/>

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Inaugural lecture of the academic year 2011-2012

Presentation

Guy Haug, President of the Advisory Board of the UOC International Graduate Institute and European expert in higher education systems, and university assessment and development, was chosen for the inaugural lecture of the academic year 2011-2012. This year's lecture used a new format.

Rather than being a one-way speech, the speaker puts forward a series of lines for debate that are published a few days in advance on the inaugural lecture's website. At the event, Guy Haug then talks about these lines for debate in a short and open conversation (30 minutes) moderated by Dr Carles Sigalés (Director of the UOC's Psychology and Educational Sciences department). This conversation is broadcast live via video streaming and Twitter (in Catalan and Spanish).

The event takes place on 27 September 2011 at the Wikilounge, the UOC's Barcelonès centre (Rambla de Catalunya 6, Barcelona).

Links

Web: <http://www.uoc.edu/inaugural11>

Chronicle 2.0 (Storify, in Catalan and Spanish): <http://storify.com/uocuniversitat/llico-inaugural-del-curs-2011-2012-de-la-uoc>

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7WYySM8w5M>

Lines of argument

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Key to Employability and International Cooperation

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1. The EHEA: what are the reforming processes?

Bologna: structural reforms and curricular renewal

The objective of creating an integrated, coherent and internationally competitive EHEA began in 1999 at the combined initiative of universities and governments with the Bologna Declaration, which set European higher education objectives for the first time:

- Creation of a common reference framework for qualifications.
- Generalisation of a system of qualifications organised in the 3 levels of bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctoral degree.
- Generalisation of a compatible European credit system (ECTS).
- Quality assurance/accreditation with a European dimension.
- Removal of the residual barriers to mobility.

The Declaration was initially signed by 30 countries, but there are now 47 countries taking part in the Bologna process (all of the EU-27, plus 20 others, including Russia and Turkey). It is a commitment by each country to reform the **structures** of university qualifications, which also gives rise to a powerful wave of **curricular renewal** in terms of the course methods, objectives and relevance.

EU: the university modernisation and competitiveness agenda

This second reforming trend complements and reinforces the Bologna process in the 27 countries in the EU. It seeks to foster socioeconomic development and employment thanks to improvements in:

- The governance of higher education systems and institutions in accordance with the needs of their surroundings.
- The diversification and relevance of the education on offer for both young people and adults (lifelong learning).
- The more efficient funding of universities and students.
- The mobilisation of the research abilities of universities.

Likewise, these reforms, combined with those of the Bologna process, must foster the legibility, attractiveness and competitiveness of European universities worldwide.

2. A European university area: why and by whom?

The underlying objectives of the European university reforms come together differently in each country, but in almost all of them they are in response to similar challenges, which include:

- **The need for greater student and graduate mobility:** the experience gained through programmes such as ERASMUS, which allowed for more than 1 million student exchanges, also highlighted that the scant compatibility between university systems was the greatest barrier to the development of greater and more spontaneous mobility.
- **The challenges of a true European labour market** where professionals compete irrespectively of their country of origin. In this new setting, comparisons arise between the level of training and the age of entry in this market, which penalises systems with excessively long courses. It also reinforces the need for a better system of recognition of qualifications so that people can use their right to study and work anywhere in the EU.
- The insufficient **efficiency of higher education in numerous countries** due to the lack of relevance (not of academic quality) and the scant flexibility of numerous courses that prevent students from fulfilling their own learning needs and result in excessively long courses and high failure and drop-out rates.

3. Curricular renewal: compatibility, diversity and relevance

The curricular renewal process has turned Europe into a real 'work in progress' in terms of its universities. It is a question of renewing university courses within the common European framework, combining diversity with compatibility and causing a threefold change of paradigm: from mere academic quality to societal relevance, from the teaching and teacher to the learning and learner, and from initial training to lifelong learning. This entails:

- **The creation of compatible qualifications at the bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctoral degree levels** to replace the old linear courses that are excessively long and rigid (such as undergraduate degrees in Spain), defining them in terms of skills that should be acquired and introducing ECTS credits. At the European level, the agreement is that:
 - The bachelor's degree should be between 180 and 240 ECTS credits (normally between 3 and 4 years).
 - The master's degree should vary between a minimum of 90 (or exceptionally 60) and a maximum of 120 ECTS.
 - The doctoral degree should normally be 3 years, including the taught stage and the thesis. These rules are common but flexible, and it has been shown that it is important that the flexibility that there is at the European level should not disappear at the national level with overly rigid regulations.
- **Compatible qualifications with flexible profiles:** the European structural framework should embrace university courses with highly diverse profiles, particularly with regard to preparing students for the European labour market – from courses with vocational aims to other more general ones, with the emphasis on cross-disciplinary skills, research or preparation for further studies. This diversity must allow students to choose from between the programmes and specialisations offered by both universities in their own country and other European universities.
- **Greater quality and relevance in what students learn:** besides organising diversity, the EHEA also tries to foster the quality and socioeconomic relevance of university courses in the new Europe. Quality is not measured by the course prospectus or the high level of teaching but in terms of what students really learn. A quality university is one that leads the highest number of students to success and that strives to reduce failure and drop-out rates. A fruitful movement, started by the TUNING project, has consisted of comparing the courses at various European universities in a specific disciplinary or professional field, so revealing the common

skills and requirements between them all and identifying 'European' profiles that may inspire the curricular renewal process.

4. Quality assurance and accreditation

Quality assurance or accreditation systems have been put in place as the cornerstone of the EHEA and of the credibility of qualifications. It is true that quality lies with the universities and that each one has to develop its own mechanisms for assessment and improvement, but this is not enough, either to know what courses meet certain standards or for comparison between qualifications. For this reason, almost every country has created assessment or accreditation agencies, such as the ANECA in Spain. However, the seal of quality awarded by these agencies is not worth much, either within or outside their country, if they do not have the trust of their peers, i.e. if they do not have the independence, the standards and the procedures that warrant this trust.

Beyond national mechanisms, European seals of quality specific to certain disciplinary fields (such as chemistry or music) or professional fields (such as business studies, IT or engineering) need to be developed.

5. The EHEA: competition and cooperation with other countries

EHEA university reforms condition the future of every country in Europe and the future of Europe in the world. As we have seen, the EHEA has an internal aspect (coherence and quality/relevance of higher education in Europe) and another external one, which seeks to foster the legibility, credibility, competitiveness and image of European universities and the attractiveness of the EHEA as a whole worldwide.

As a result, the new educational Europe fosters diverse yet sufficiently compatible educational systems so that Europeans can make the most of its diversity instead of being limited by it. Yet at the same time it aims to ensure that universities become vehicles for the cultures, languages, values, and the social model and technology of Europe in their cooperation with the rest of the world.

As seen, aspects of competition (affirming the quality and attraction of Europe) and of cooperation (making European universities better partners of universities on other continents) are mixed, which is usually the case in the age of knowledge and globalisation. These objectives underpin:

- The international activities of the majority of universities and quality agencies in Europe thanks to national and European seals of quality with international credibility.
- The EU plan to propose less biased and more useful university rankings than the current ones, which exclusively give privilege to the research work of universities and ignore their results in such important areas as teaching, lifelong learning and the social inclusion of the model.
- The development of new European programmes such as ERASMUS MUNDUS (high-quality combined master's and doctoral degrees), MARIE-CURIE (researcher mobility) and regional cooperation programmes such as ALFA for Latin America.
- The various national initiatives regarding the emergence and recognition of poles or campuses of international excellence (e.g. in Germany, France and Spain).

This allows us to conclude that the EHEA is both a key to the development of Europe during these times of crisis (providing the proposed reforms are effectively carried out) and an experience of agreed reforms that can be shared with other continents (if it is seen as an invitation to think and act, not as a model to be imitated).



Dr. Guy Haug

Expert in the assessment and development of higher education strategies and institutions at a European and international level.

President of the Advisory Board of the UOC International Graduate Institute.

Advisor to the President of the Polytechnic University of Valencia.

Guy Haug is one of the founding figures of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA):

- As principal designer of the Bologna Process when he was Principal Advisor to the European University Association (EUA) (1998-2001).
- As initiator and promoter of the EU's higher education modernisation strategy when he was Principal Advisor to the European Commission (2001-06).
- As a member of the team that designed and initiated the European cooperation and mobility programmes (Erasmus, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus).

Professional career

- University management and institutional development (at a highly Europeanised/ internationalised French business school)
- Business management, as Vice President and Director General for Europe of the CIEE, a multinational university services and travel company (New York/Paris).
- University internationalisation, mobility and international cooperation both in Europe and on other continents, especially USA and Latin America.
- Assessment and implementation of projects, programmes, agencies, institutional strategies and public policies with a view to the socioeconomic impact and international competitiveness of higher education.
- Cooperation with international organisations (EU, OECD, World Bank, UNESCO) and numerous university networks in Europe and on other continents.

Guy Haug has a degree in Law (Strasbourg, France), a doctoral degree in Political Science (Tübingen, Germany), an honorary degree (HETAC, Ireland) and an MBA (Ottawa, Canada).

Chronicle

Moderator: Dr Carles Sigalés, Director of the UOC's Psychology and Educational Sciences Department

Guy Haug: “The future is about giving students the opportunity to do what suits them the best”

By Núria Toril (journalist)

It has been twelve years since the beginning of the Bologna Process, by which a number of European countries started work on creating a common framework of qualifications intended to facilitate the mobility of students as well as labour mobility. Initially, there were 30 countries involved. This number has increased to 47 at present (all of the European Union countries plus 20 others). At what point does Spain find itself? Have they done their homework? How is the crisis affecting the European Higher Education Area?

A slow and bureaucratic process

Dr Haug is blunt when speaking about the situation in Spain in terms of adaptation to the Bologna Process. “In Spain the process has been difficult and slower than in other European countries. There has been much resistance to change and the results have not always been as desired”, he explains. Haug believes that the existing university model in Spain was different and more traditional than in other countries and that, in addition, the process of adaptation to the EHEA has been very bureaucratic and complicated, “with strict regulations, with royal decrees”, he adds.

When talking about excessive bureaucracy Guy Haug uses as an example the duration and articulation of degrees. “In Spain a decision was made at the national level that all degrees would consist of 240 ECTS credits. There are countries, though, where the universities are more flexible and this flexibility translates into students being able to choose between taking a master’s course consisting of 90 or 120 credits”.

Haug believes that Spain is not the only country where the process has been difficult but remains optimistic: “There are things that will be corrected. We have to take it one step at a time”.

Flexibility and students at the centre of the learning process

Dr Carles Sigalés, director of the Department of Psychology, is charged with interviewing Guy Haug during the inaugural lesson and asked him to be specific about what should be done in order to make the university curriculum relevant.

“One of the motivations of the EHEA is to place the student at the centre of the learning process. There are countries where the university continues to function for internal reasons without really taking students into account”, says Guy Haug adding that “traditionally, curricula have been put together backwards, following the will of departments and faculties. The result of these curricula does not guarantee that students learn what they want or need”.

In the opinion of Dr Haug there are degrees that are inconsistent with society and the job market. “The lack of relevance consists of designing courses that are highly demanding and abstract and poorly adapted to employment needs. An example, out of every 100 engineers, only one will devote their efforts to research, while the curriculum, traditionally, is designed for what is required by those engaged in research”. Guy Haug believes that curricula should emphasize the competences that need to be acquired, in addition to knowledge.

Further, Dr Haug also understands flexibility as the possibility that universities must have to introduce curricular changes so as to adapt quickly to their environment or to labour needs. “We will all use the same currency, which is the ECTS credit. But every university will offer something different so that the student will not be limited to a single menu but can choose what suits them best”.

The EHEA, to combat the crisis

One of the objectives of Bologna is the development of a true European labour market in which everyone can compete without comparisons arising in terms of level of preparation. Now, however, as pointed out by Carles Sigalés, in a time of crisis and cutbacks, voices have emerged that question whether this system can work.

But Guy Haug believes that now more than ever the European Area makes sense. “I am convinced that in Spain universities are an absolutely essential ingredient for advancement, for overcoming the crisis and building a future”. Haug insists that it is precisely now, when there are economic problems, that the university must be made more

efficient. "When in a country it takes eight years to complete a four-year program, a great amount of economic resources are used, by both the public sector and students' families".

Dr Haug believes that the basic elements of Bologna are also basic elements for overcoming the crisis: relevance, mobility and flexibility to adjust education to the needs of students to avoid repeating what they already know.

Lifelong learning and the role of universities such as the UOC

Guy Haug believes that it is important, for the future, to understand that education is a process to be followed throughout one's lifetime and that universities must adapt to this fact. To this effect, Haug again affirms the need for flexibility and for making professional and university experience compatible. "Students should be able to enter and leave the university system as needed. I think that distance universities, such as the UOC, are those that have best understood this and have modified their curricula to make them more flexible. It is a strong point that differentiates them".

Haug also believes that it is important that university qualifications recognize professional experience. "There are countries where you can obtain a full degree based on recognition of your professional experience. In Spain, this is limited to 15% of the credits for a degree".

Breaking down the barriers to mobility

Guy Haug thinks that mobility has increased with the Bologna Process but that it is still far from what Europe needs. "The future lies in eliminating obstacles. And the main obstacle is the recognition of university qualifications; that with a degree from any country a student can have access to masters in another. This is the future. The future is to provide students with the opportunity to do what suits them the best"



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