



# 4 | A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON AGRICULTURAL HIGHER EDUCATION

THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION of 1999 and Prague conference in May 2001 have set important benchmarks for the increased harmonisation of European Higher Education. Despite this there are still considerable differences between the length and content of undergraduate and Masters courses within the EU. This diversity will be increased with the accession of ten more countries this year (taking the total to 25). The UK has always been different from much of Europe in that its BSc and MSc programmes are considerably shorter (i.e. three or four years versus four or five years for BSc, and one year versus two or three years for MSc). In some countries the norm is still for students to study for a Masters, with little opportunity (or demand) for an exit at Bachelor level.

One of the outcomes from Bologna was the commitment to a two-cycle education system, these being an undergraduate (Bachelor level) and a Masters' level. Overall such a model would fit with the broader aims of the European Commission, providing shorter study periods containing more practically (industrially) oriented experience to enhance economic growth, competitiveness and employment. Most countries are still working toward the adoption of these educational structures which should lead to greater flexibility in higher education studies, offer opportunities for reforming and expanding curricula, and permit greater differentiation at the Masters' level. There is a resistance in some European institutions to recognise that a Bachelor qualification is attainable in three years, or that it is a realistic exit point for higher degree students from

which they can start to pursue a career. However, the gradual adoption of the

common framework should mean that in the future students will be able to move more freely between institutions during their studies and the Bachelor or Masters qualification would be more widely interpretable by employers across Europe. Susanne (2003)<sup>1</sup> provides an overview of teaching systems for biology in different nation states, see Table 1.

Increased commonality between programmes should also allow closer liaison between HEIs across Europe, although few currently offer joint degree programmes. Language may still be a problem for many students who want to study for their degree in

**Table 1** Some examples of the teaching system in Biology with respect to the new Bologna system (3 years BSc + 2 years MSc + 3 years)

Country	Duration
Austria	Probably 3 + 2
Belgium	3 + 2 + 3 in September 2004
Czech Republic	3 + 2 + 8
Germany	Probably 4 + 1 + 3
Denmark	3 + 2 + 3
Spain	In some universities 3 + 2 + 3; in others 4 + 1 + 3
France	3 + 2 + 3 in September 2004/2005
Greece	Probably 4 + 1 (or 2) + at least 3
Croatia	4 + 1 + 3 or 3 + 2 + 3
Hungary	Universities are opposed to the changes because they would be linked to a decrease of education finances
Ireland	3 + 2 + 3 or 4 + 1 + 3
Italy	3 + 2 + 3 (already in use)
Poland	3 + 2 + 4
Portugal	4 + 1 + 3
Slovenia	Probably 4 + 1 + 3
UK	Generally 3 + 0 + 3; sometimes 3 + 1 + 3 In Scotland the BSc may be 4 and the PhD moving towards 4