

Harmonisation of Physical Education in Europe

*Ken Hardman,
University College Worcester*

Introductory Statement

The concept of harmonisation in physical education in Europe is by no means new as testified in the 1975 Council of Europe 'Sport for All' Charter. However, the protagonist push towards it is relatively recent, inspired perhaps by the Physical Education Committee of the European Network of Sport Sciences in Education and by individuals such as Willy Laporte, who was arguing for Europeanisation of concepts and programmes in the mid-1990s, epitomised in his view that "... In Physical Education teacher education, perhaps more than in other scientific domains we need to find a common framework which can be developed into a common European vision" (Laporte, 1997, p.35). The process of harmonisation was aided and abetted by European Union programmes such as Erasmus and Socrates. These programmes not only facilitated (and continue to do so) staff and student exchanges but also were used to spawn undergraduate and master's levels programmes' initiatives to seek harmonisation by offering trans-national physical education-related courses involving bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral arrangements of participating partner institutions. One example is the European PE Master's programme, which, in its planning development phase, involved 17 'Partner' institutions in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK

The Bologna Agreement and Harmonisation

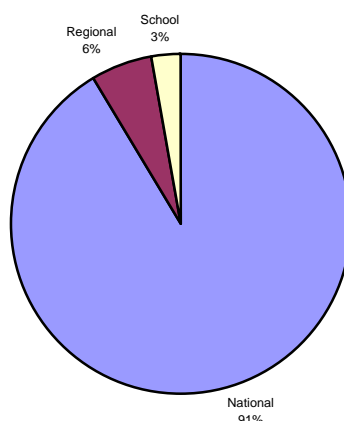
The trend to harmonisation was clearly articulated in the 1999 Bologna Agreement to create a common model for Higher Education in Europe with member states subsequently encouraged to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competencies, and profiles. Hence, the European Commission funded thematic three-year project *Aligning European Higher Education Structure in Sport Science* (AEHESIS), which amongst others items will collate intelligence on the extent of implementation of the Bologna Process through identification of common elements (congruence), as well as any areas of specificity and diversity amongst higher education institutions across Europe. From the findings of the project's first two years, it is possible to draw inferences regarding the extent of harmonisation in European institutions and countries. Whilst it is obvious that ECTS interpretations are neither European-wide nor are credit

numbers and study load weightings required for a qualification consistent across institutions, harmonisation is congruently represented in programme names and academic/vocational orientations, programme entry requirements, teaching methods, assessment and evaluation procedures, quality assurance measures, generic and physical-education-specific competences and not unsurprisingly first job destinations, where *primary and/or secondary (and variations) school PE Teacher* is identified as the main ‘standard occupation’ destination, the pervasive enterprise of which is defined as *teaching physical education (activities)* with emphasis on a *broad and balanced curriculum fostering knowledge, skills and understanding* and some variations representing cultural pre-dispositions.

Physical Education in Schools

I turn now to harmonisation (or otherwise) of school physical education across Europe. As evidence, I draw from data currently being generated by a follow-up to the Hardman and Marshall (2000) PE world-wide survey and specifically from a semi-structured questionnaire instrument administered through the Council of Europe Committee for the Development of Sport (CDDS) unit with responses from 35 countries’ representative government level agencies. From the outset, however, I have to urge caution in interpretation of the data because as Maude de Boer-Buquiccio, the Council of Europe Deputy General Secretary observed (2002) “there is too much of a gap between the promise and the reality”. Survey data generated from government-level agencies tend more often than not to reflect policy principles rather than the realities of actual implementation and practice.

Within the general education system, all countries in the European region have legal requirements (or it is generally practised) with prescriptive or guideline expectations for physical education for both boys and girls for at least some part of the compulsory schooling years. In a large majority of countries there is a governmental agency (national or regional state, where decentralised forms of government are constituted as in Belgium and the Federal Republic of Germany) with responsibility for physical education (see figure 1.), though administrative and delivery responsibility is devolved to local authorities or schools.

Figure 1. Responsible curriculum authority

Figures 2, 3 and 4 respectively show that in 85% of countries, the physical education curriculum is implemented in accordance with regulations, in 88% of countries legally physical education has the same status as other curriculum subjects and in 80% of countries physical education teachers have the same status as other subject teachers. On the other hand, however, nearly one third of countries indicate that its subject status is inferior and that physical education classes are cancelled more often than other subject classes.

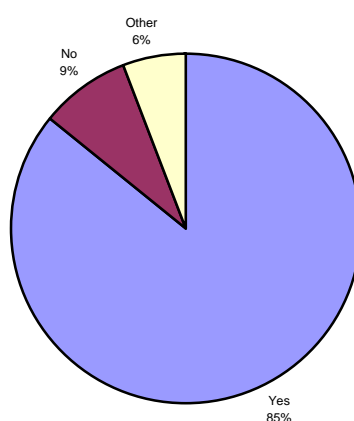
Figure 2. Curriculum Implementation in accordance with regulations

Figure 3. PE legal subject status

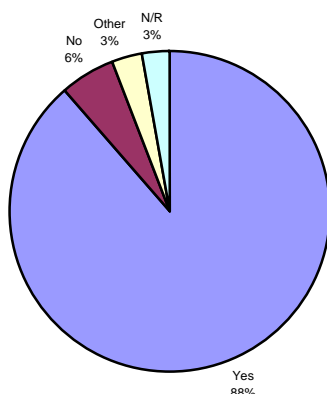
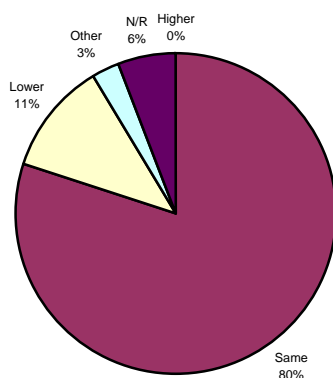
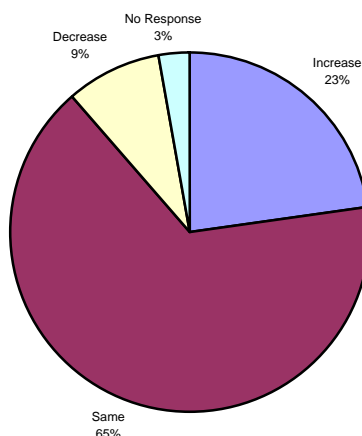


Figure 4. PE teacher status



In the last decade many European nations have undertaken educational reforms. Since 2002, whilst it is encouraging to see that physical education has remained compulsory in all countries and that time allocation has actually increased in just over a fifth of countries and remained the same in another 65% of countries (refer figure 5). The issue of time allocation is a complicated one because of localised control of curricular timetables, which vary considerably between schools and especially in those countries, where responsibility for delivery of the curriculum has been divested to individual schools. However, some general tendencies can be identified. Weekly timetable allocation across the region is 115 minutes (range of 30-225 minutes) with two modal clusters of 90 and 135 minutes in primary schools and 111 minutes (range 45-240 minutes) with modal clusters also at 90 and 135 minutes in secondary schools.

Figure 5. Curriculum developments since 2000: time



Clear evidence of harmonisation in European school physical education is seen in the presence of six main activity areas in the physical education curriculum in both primary and secondary schools (see table 1). Of some significance is the percentage of time devoted to each activity area across the region's schools: there is a predisposition to a competitive sport discourse dominated by games, track & field athletics and gymnastics.

Table 1.

Activity Area	PE Curriculum Activity Areas			
	Primary Countries %	Schools Curriculum %	Secondary Countries %	Schools Curriculum %
Games	97	35	100	39
Gymnastics	97	18	100	16
Dance	80	7	74	5
Swimming	80	7	74	6
OP	71	6	69	6
Track & Field	94	16	100	21
Other	51	7	63	7

A high level of congruence is also seen in monitoring (inspection), requirement, nature and scope of monitoring and responsible agencies. Just over 70% of countries require monitoring of physical education programmes and 80% indicate monitoring does take place with responsibility largely lying with national, regional and local inspection authorities (see figure 6.). The scope of monitoring embraces a range of aspects but predominantly the extent of curriculum implementation and quality of teaching (refer figure 7.); quality control and/or

advisory guidance are given as the reasons for monitoring in over 90% of countries, where monitoring occurs (see figure 8.).

Figure 6. Monitoring (inspection) of programmes

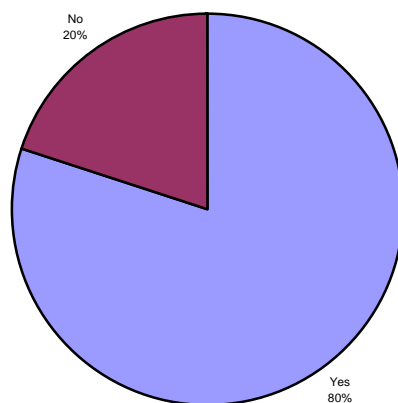


Figure 7. Scope of PE monitoring

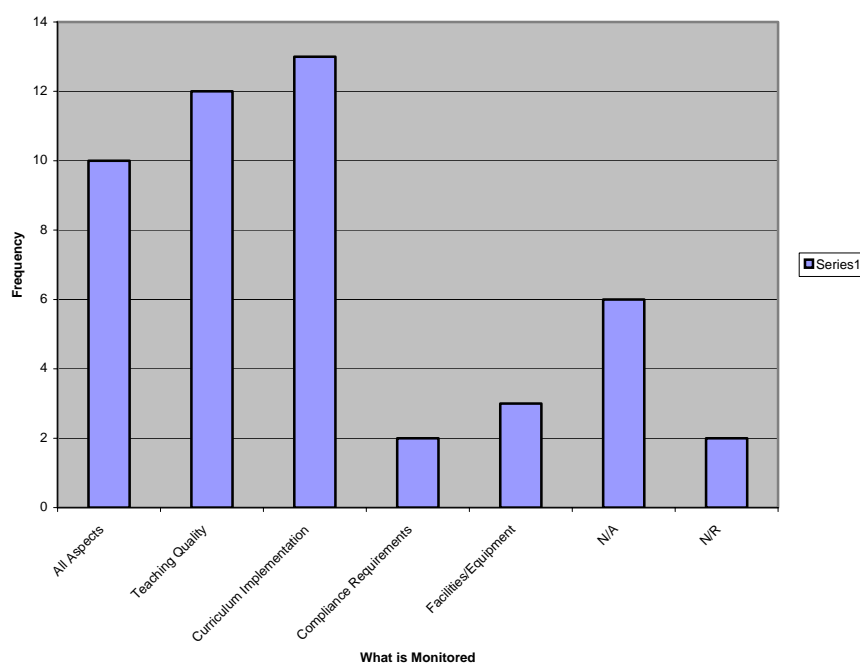
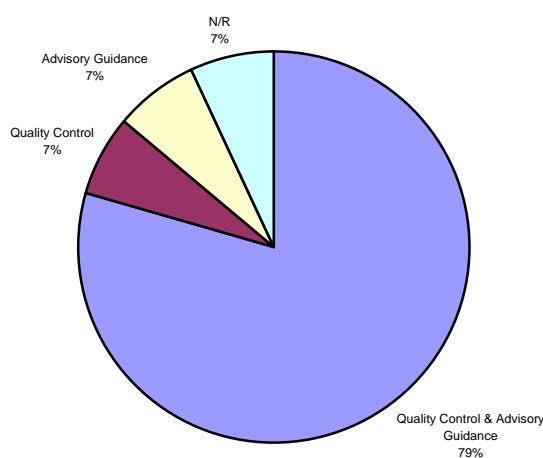


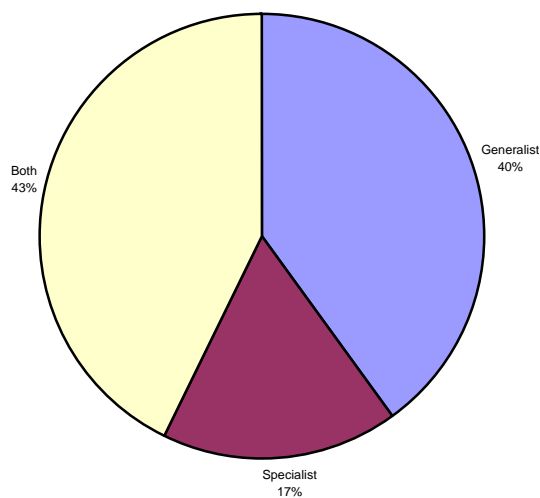
Figure 8. Reasons for monitoring



The survey encompassed two resource items: provision of facilities and equipment and physical education teaching personnel. There is a marked geo-political differentiation in quality and quantity of facilities and equipment. In the more economically prosperous northern and western European countries, quality and quantity of facilities and equipment are regarded as at least adequate and in some instances excellent; in central and eastern European countries, there are inadequacies/insufficiencies in both quality and quantity of facilities and equipment. Hence, there is an east-west European divide with central and eastern European countries generally far less well endowed with facilities and equipment. Transcending this divide was the view in 60% of countries that there are problems of low levels of maintenance of existing physical education sites.

As previous research (see Hardman, 2002) has also shown, generally throughout Europe, physical education teaching degree and diploma qualifications are acquired at universities, pedagogical institutes, national sports academies or specialist physical education/sport institutes. For primary school teaching, qualifications tend to be acquired at pedagogical institutes and or universities, whilst for secondary school teaching, qualifications are predominantly acquired at university level institutions, including specialist Academies and Faculties. Both 'generalist' and 'specialist' qualified personnel teach physical education in primary schools: generalist teachers feature in 83% of countries and specialists in 60% of countries (see figure 9.).

Figure 9. Teacher type: primary schools



At secondary school level throughout the region, the large majority (94%) of physical education practitioners are specialists (see figure 10.).

Figure 10. Teacher type: secondary schools

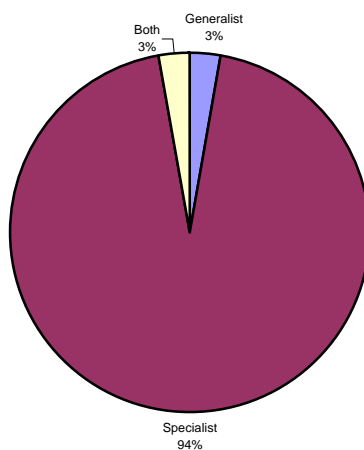
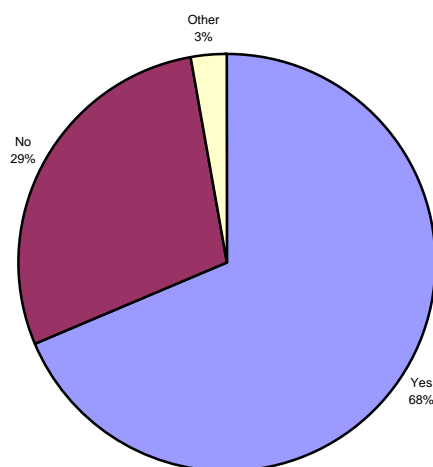
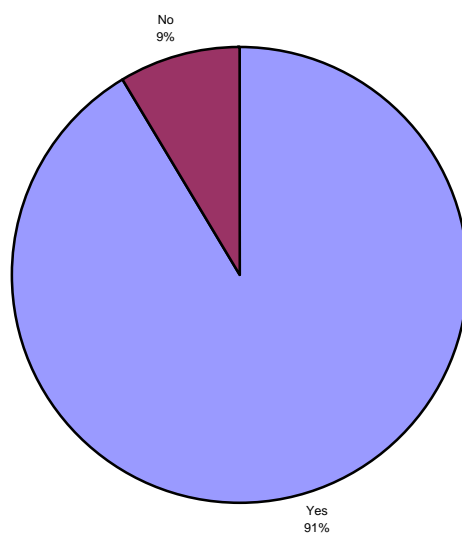


Figure 11. shows that over two-thirds of countries require in-service training (INSET)/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to be undertaken but there are substantial variations in frequency and time allocated for INSET/CPD.

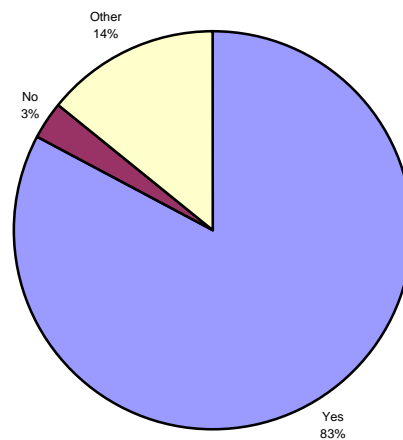
Figure 11. Required INSET/CPD

The survey also addressed two equity issues: gender and disability. For both issues, a high degree of congruence is indicated across the region: over 90% of countries indicate equality of opportunity for boys and girls in physical education programmes (figure 12.);

Figure 12. Equality of opportunity: boys/girls

and over 80% allege availability of opportunities for students with disabilities for access to physical education lessons (figure 13.).

Figure 13. Equality of opportunity: disability



Conclusions

Arguably, the data collated from Council of Europe Member States CDDS representatives provide a distorted continental regional and individual national picture of physical education in schools, particularly where questionnaire responses are based on policy and as such may mask the truth about actual practice. However, what the survey data do reveal are congruent features in several areas of school physical education policy and undoubtedly in some specific areas of practice. Together with AEHESIS Project data and the initiatives to develop pan-European undergraduate and Master's programmes, especially in the area of PETE as well as a range of EU funded initiatives, the extent of congruence provides evidence to suggest that the harmonisation process is well underway with broad agreement on concept and aims, which transcend cross-national divides and with relevant policies and structures already in position.

References

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