

Bologna Summit: closing address Rt Hon Alan Johnson Secretary of State for Education and Skills

Thanks to Frank [Vandenbroucke], Marie-Dominique [Simonet], and Commissioner Figel for their closing thoughts. I would also like to extend my thanks to all of you for attending this summit.

The last two days have offered the chance to reflect on the great strides we have taken in developing the European Higher Education Area through the Bologna Process. We are steadily achieving comparability between our degree systems, getting better at recognising qualifications awarded in other countries, and improving the quality of provision to students and staff experiencing higher education in other countries.

We have also begun a lively debate about what happens next, and discussed what a dynamic EHEA will look like as we move forward. But, most importantly, we have jointly agreed the London Communiqué – an important statement of purpose setting out our future programme of work.

Clearly, we face some tough challenges ahead, but three priority areas, identified in the Communiqué, will help us to focus, and maintain momentum.

The first is increasing mobility. We all believe in equality when it comes to race, sexuality or freedom of speech. Our attitude towards education ought to be the same: regarding it as a universal right, not a luxury for the privileged few. We now need to work hard at removing obstacles to learning – whether that means providing financial assistance for students or recognising qualifications gained in other countries so they are able to continue their education in another country.

All students should have the opportunity to spend some time studying abroad. Not only do they get to develop the knowledge and skills to secure a good job, but they have the chance to encounter new cultures, enhance their grasp of foreign languages and gain lasting personal experiences.

The second is improving employability. As the needs of business become ever more complex, the clamour for graduates grows louder. But besides these pressing economic demands, it is worth considering another important dimension.

Social exclusion is a blight across Europe. It causes crime, anti-social behaviour, and added pressures on state benefits. The best way we can tackle exclusion is by getting people into work. A good career offers the best route out of under-achievement, depression, and dependence. That starts, of course, with high-quality schooling, but we must also harness higher education's potential to promote social mobility.

Encouraging students to attain a bachelor's degree and then go further – to the master's and doctorate level – will unquestionably improve their prospects. Employers, meanwhile, will be in a better position to recruit the graduates whose qualities will be of the greatest value to their organisations.

However, if higher education is to boost competitiveness and growth in European economies, we also need to ensure that everyone involved with higher education is listening to those employers. We must engage in proper dialogue with chief executives and company owners when designing courses and qualifications.

Employability will be a significant measure of our success. The Bologna Follow-Up Group will consider how we can make further progress in this key area when it next reports.

The third is getting the European Higher Education Area up and running.

Our efforts over the past eight years has put us well on target to do so by 2010, but there is still some way to go. Over the next two years, our reforms must concentrate, above all, on the experience of students. By the end of their studies, they must be in the best position to get a job. This focus on learning outcomes applies to every area of our work – from quality assurance, to the details of course recognition and systems of credit. It is key to realising an EHEA that is outward-looking, valued by business and ready to facilitate learning on an international scale.

If we get these three things right, Europe's graduates will be a force to be reckoned with: smart, competitive, and well-rounded.

Of course, some challenges are more difficult than others. Not only must we be convinced of the rightness of our cause, but we must also convince our partners – higher education institutions, regulatory bodies, employers, and students themselves – of the great benefits that will accrue from breaking down barriers to learning across Europe.

Equally, some challenges fall beyond our remit as ministers. It is going to take governments and respective higher education sectors working together to devise effective solutions.

As we move towards more comparable degree systems, graduate qualifications will become a common stamp in the European learning passport, and the European Higher Education Area will become an exciting forum for ideas and innovation.

With the close of this summit, the UK is handing over the baton to the Benelux countries. I wish them all the best as they prepare for the next ministerial summit in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009.

And once again, I thank all of you for your participation this year, and wish everyone a safe journey home.

Bologna Summit: closing address

Thanks to Frank [Vandenbroucke], Marie-Dominique [Simonet], and Commissioner Figel for their closing thoughts. I would also like to extend my thanks to all of you for attending this summit.

The last two days have offered the chance to reflect on the great strides we have taken in developing the European Higher Education Area through the Bologna Process. We are steadily achieving comparability between our degree systems, getting better at recognising qualifications awarded in other countries, and improving the quality of provision to students and staff experiencing higher education in other countries.

We have also begun a lively debate about what happens next, and discussed what a dynamic EHEA will look like as we move forward. But, most importantly, we have jointly agreed the London Communiqué – an important statement of purpose setting out our future programme of work.

Clearly, we face some tough challenges ahead, but three priority areas, identified in the Communiqué, will help us to focus, and maintain momentum.

The first is increasing mobility. We all believe in equality when it comes to race, sexuality or freedom of speech. Our attitude towards education ought to be the same: regarding it as a universal right, not a luxury for the privileged few. We now need to work hard at removing obstacles to learning – whether that means providing financial assistance for students or recognising qualifications gained in other countries so they are able to continue their education in another country.

All students should have the opportunity to spend some time studying abroad. Not only do they get to develop the knowledge and skills to secure a good job, but they have the chance to encounter new cultures, enhance their grasp of foreign languages and gain lasting personal experiences.

The second is improving employability. As the needs of business become ever more complex, the clamour for graduates grows louder. But besides these pressing economic demands, it is worth considering another important dimension.

Social exclusion is a blight across Europe. It causes crime, anti-social behaviour, and added pressures on state benefits. The best way we can tackle exclusion is by getting people into work. A good career offers the best route out of under-achievement, depression, and dependence. That starts, of course, with high-quality schooling, but we must also harness higher education's potential to promote social mobility.

Encouraging students to attain a bachelor's degree and then go further – to the master's and doctorate level – will unquestionably improve their prospects. Employers, meanwhile, will be in a better position to recruit the graduates whose qualities will be of the greatest value to their organisations.

However, if higher education is to boost competitiveness and growth in European economies, we also need to ensure that everyone involved with higher education is listening to those employers. We must engage in proper dialogue with chief executives and company owners when designing courses and qualifications.

Employability will be a significant measure of our success. The Bologna Follow-Up Group will consider how we can make further progress in this key area when it next reports.

The third is getting the European Higher Education Area up and running.

Our efforts over the past eight years has put us well on target to do so by 2010, but there is still some way to go. Over the next two years, our reforms must concentrate, above all, on the experience of students. By the end of their studies, they must be in the best position to get a job. This focus on learning outcomes applies to every area of our work – from quality assurance, to the details of course recognition and systems of credit. It is key to realising an EHEA that is outward-looking, valued by business and ready to facilitate learning on an international scale.

If we get these three things right, Europe's graduates will be a force to be reckoned with: smart, competitive, and well-rounded.

Of course, some challenges are more difficult than others. Not only must we be convinced of the rightness of our cause, but we must also convince our partners – higher education institutions, regulatory bodies, employers, and students themselves – of the great benefits that will accrue from breaking down barriers to learning across Europe.

Equally, some challenges fall beyond our remit as ministers. It is going to take governments and respective higher education sectors working together to devise effective solutions.

As we move towards more comparable degree systems, graduate qualifications will become a common stamp in the European learning passport, and the European Higher Education Area will become an exciting forum for ideas and innovation.

With the close of this summit, the UK is handing over the baton to the Benelux countries. I wish them all the best as they prepare for the next ministerial summit in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009.

And once again, I thank all of you for your participation this year, and wish everyone a safe journey home.