

UK Position Statement

Bergen ministerial summit - May 2005

UK support for the Bologna Process

1. The UK welcomes the Bologna Process in providing the potential to strengthen institutions and to widen student and staff opportunities for personal development through increased mobility across Europe. This increased mobility offers students and staff the possibility to acquire the experience, language skills and cultural maturity required by the European labour market. The UK also welcomes the Bologna Process objective to make European higher education (HE) more attractive in a global market to help higher education institutions compete internationally. The incorporation of doctoral level qualifications as the third cycle in the Bologna Process is strongly supported by the UK. It recognises the important link between teaching and research in Europe's higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as the contribution of university-based research to the achievement of the European Union's Lisbon strategy on competitiveness.

2. UK HE awareness and engagement in the Bologna Process has grown significantly since the Berlin ministerial summit in 2003. In 2004, UK HE stakeholdersⁱ – signatories to this policy statement - established the sector-wide UK HE Europe Unit to raise awareness of the Bologna Process and to support institutions in implementing Bologna reforms in the UK. UK institutional and stakeholder representation has increased in the official Bologna Process seminars and events of the key European HE umbrella bodies: European University Association (EUA); the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE); and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB). Furthermore the UK held its first Bologna Process seminar in 2004, hosted by the Scottish Executive; and there has also been an increase in national-level Bologna Process activity elsewhere in the UK, including a number of sector-wide events in Wales. More UK HEIsⁱⁱ have been participating in a wider range of EUA and European Commission Bologna projectsⁱⁱ and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has been a key player in taking forward the Berlin quality assurance (QA) mandate.

3. The UK welcomes the key outcomes of the recent EUA Convention in Glasgow, where European HEIs agreed upon the next steps of the Bologna Process from 2005 –2007. The UK, positively experiencing diversity within its four HE systems, believes diversity within the broad framework of the European HE Area (EHEA) would also be beneficial.

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4. We look forward to progressing many of the issues discussed in Glasgow, under the UK's Presidency of the EU from July to December 2005.

Consolidation of Bologna Process reforms

5. The UK welcomes the additional action lines and priorities established at the Bologna Process ministerial summits in Prague in 2001 and in Berlin in 2003. However, we emphasise that the period between the Bergen ministerial summit in May 2005 and the subsequent summit in 2007 should be a time for consolidation of Bologna reforms. Europe's higher education institutions need time to adapt to the major structural changes of their higher education systems – for example, in the greater use of learning outcomes - and to implement sustainable reform. The lead up to the 2007 ministerial summit should also allow for evaluation of the success of the various Bologna reforms.

Management of the Process

6. The UK emphasises that the creation of the EHEA must continue to be through an intergovernmental process based on respect for the diversity of European higher education systems, continuing to allow for national responsibility for higher education policy. It is important that all participating national education ministries reach consensus on the next steps of the Process and commit to implementing it.
7. We emphasize that decision-making in the Bologna Process must remain the preserve of the HE Ministers in consultation with HE stakeholders in the EHEA. Decision-making must not be subsumed into EU fora, because the latter would exclude some participants in the Process. It is also essential that decision-making occurs in an open and transparent manner. This will ensure the effectiveness of the Bologna Process and that the opportunities it offers are available to all signatory countries.
8. We also welcome the increased role played by HEIs in all areas of the Bologna Process, both as individual institutions and through the EUA and EURASHE. The success of the EHEA depends upon the active involvement of institutions in implementing Bologna Process reforms. The EUA's Trends IV report provides valuable information about real progress in implementing Bologna reforms within institutions.

Quality assurance

9. The UK welcomes European cooperation to assure the high quality of HE in the interest of enhancing the international competitiveness of higher education institutions. Shared understanding and implementation of standards for quality in European higher education have the potential to foster increased quality of HE and facilitate recognition through the development of a culture of mutual trust among participating countries.

10. The UK strongly endorses the principle of institutional autonomy in quality assurance and the 2003 Bologna Process Berlin Communiqué statement that “*the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework*”. The EUA’s ‘Quality Culture Project’, emphasising a bottom-up approach, contains useful recommendations on internal quality assurance for European institutions and has a commendable emphasis on improvement and development.
11. The UK welcomes the ‘Report on Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area’ produced by the European Association for Quality Assurance in HE (ENQA), in cooperation with the EUA, ESIB and EURASHE, in response to the mandate set out in the Berlin Communiqué. The UK also endorses the focus on standards and guidelines in the report, which in subsuming ‘procedures’ within the proposed guidelines enables procedures to be defined at national level. The proposals for cyclical review of quality assurance agencies and the emphasis on subsidiarity in the report are also supported. The role of the proposed European register of quality assurance agencies in helping to identify professional and credible quality assurance agencies is, in principle, welcomed. However, the UK calls for further clarification of the purpose, legal status and ownership of the register and its Committee and argues that such a register should not develop into a quasi-regulatory body or create or develop into a ranking system.
12. It is essential that quality assurance initiatives in the EHEA avoid costly and burdensome bureaucracy and particularly avoid introducing an additional bureaucratic layer of evaluation at European level. UK experience in this area can inform debates on quality assurance. Over-prescriptive quality assurance arrangements have been shown to waste resources and create perverse incentives. The UK has, on the basis of experience, moved to arrangements based on institutional review through audit (in England and Northern Ireland) and review (in Wales), together with comprehensive performance information and the use of detailed discipline-level review where necessary. In Scotland the enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) model has been developed by the Scottish higher education sector.
13. The UK welcomes moves to adopt a learning outcomes approach to quality assurance systems across the EHEA. As the UK’s Bologna Process seminar in Edinburgh highlighted, the use of learning outcomes in institutional and national quality assurance arrangements and qualifications frameworks provides a basis for developing a culture of mutual confidence and trust by facilitating meaningful comparisons. An outcomes approach allows learning, by different modes, to be assessed and compared at national and European level, and this leads naturally to transparent assurance of lifelong learning. The UK would be pleased to cooperate in sharing good practice in the use of learning outcomes.

14. Developments in quality assurance in Europe should continue to be led by institutions and key stakeholders in higher education in close dialogue with national authorities responsible for vocational and professional qualifications and with both employers and the workforce. The European Commission's draft proposal on quality assurance should reflect the outcomes of the Bergen Communiqué concerning quality assurance.

The two-cycle system and the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA

15. The UK supports the adoption in the EHEA of a system of two main cycles at undergraduate and graduate level and, following the Berlin summit in 2003, doctoral level qualifications as the third cycle. This is a system which is well-entrenched across the UK.
16. We also emphasise the need for continued flexibility in programme design and structure, within the broad parameters identified by the Bologna Process. We welcome therefore the conclusions of the 2001 Bologna Process seminar in Helsinki on 'Master's level degrees'ⁱⁱⁱ which noted that while Master's degree programmes normally carry 90 - 120 ECTS credits, the minimum requirement should amount to 60 ECTS credits at Master's level (one year). Most taught Master's degrees in the UK achieve between 75 and 90 credits (with 90 for full year Master's) and some research-based Master's, such as the MPhil, between 120 and 150. We were also pleased to note the seminar's agreement to the continued existence of 'integrated one-tier programmes leading to Master's degrees'.
17. The UK welcomes the importance attached to national qualifications frameworks (NQF) and the recognition that qualifications will reside in the NQFs, which will articulate with the proposed Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area'. (See below). We emphasise the importance of each country developing a NQF and would like to see a mechanism developed and financial support provided for the exchange of good practice and experience in use of NQFs.
18. The UK supports the Bologna Process report on the proposed 'Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area'^{iv} in enhancing the transparency of higher education qualifications in the European Higher Education Area. The typical credit allocations included in the report are also welcome in identifying common credit values associated with each level of study. Furthermore the UK supports initial agreement that credit should not be allocated at the third level. The UK welcomes the proposed arrangements for the verification of national qualifications frameworks' compatibility with the overarching European Framework. The emphasis on minimising the administrative burden in these arrangements and the deployment of existing networks for the process, rather than creating an additional trans-national agency, is strongly supported.
19. We emphasise the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for higher education and the proposed broader European framework of

qualifications (EQF) for lifelong learning encompassing general education as well as vocational education and training proposed by the European Union. We urge the European Commission to consult all parties participating in the Bologna Process in its work. The proposed EQF should build on the qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area to stimulate mobility and progression. The learning outcomes associated with higher education should be fully accommodated alongside vocational education and training competences in the European qualifications framework developments.

Recognition of degrees: Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

20. The UK supports the conclusions of the official Bologna Process seminar in Riga (2004) which set out a major agenda for the qualifications recognition community in the context of the Lisbon Recognition Convention^v and quality assured methods of working in the network of academic recognition information centres (ENIC/NARIC^{vi})

21. The Berlin Communiqué called for greater use of credit in the EHEA, such as the European Credit and Transfer System (ECTS) as a tool to increase transparency in qualifications. The comprehensive Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SQFW)^{vii} incorporates all Scottish qualifications, a similar system also operates in Wales embracing all post-16 and higher education through the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)^{viii}. In England, the work of the sector-wide 'Measuring and Recording Student Achievement project, now entering its second phase, in looking at producing a national credit system for England, may help to relate to the development of ECTS as an accumulation as well as a transfer system. This sector-wide initiative will also support the introduction of the Diploma Supplement (a transcript designed to aide recognition of qualifications) which is already underway in UK institutions.

The Bologna Process and Doctoral level qualification – 'The Third Cycle'

22. The UK supports the incorporation of doctoral level qualifications in the Bologna Process as the third cycle. This development establishes a vital link between the EHEA and the European Union's European Research Area. The effective training and development of researchers in HEIs is central to delivering the objectives of both these areas and ensuring that Europe can remain economically responsive and competitive.

23. The UK welcomes the conclusions of the Bologna Process seminar in Salzburg (2005^{ix}) which state that the diversity of doctoral programmes in Europe is a strength that has to be protected. It is crucial that Bologna Process' recommendations in this area remain flexible to accommodate the range of doctoral level programmes in Europe which vary in purpose, duration and delivery. It is also vital that the Bologna Process recognises and supports a diverse student cohort choosing a range of flexible learning paths reflecting the importance of lifelong learning. As transparency in European qualifications increases, a prescriptive

approach to defining entry requirements to doctoral level qualifications in the EHEA would be unnecessary.

24. The UK believes that doctoral training must meet the needs and challenges of both academia and a wider employment market. Research training, recognising doctoral candidates as early stage researchers and professionals, should be designed to ensure researchers are equipped with appropriate skills and have every opportunity for professional career development. In recent years the UK has been working hard to ensure that researchers are able to meet the diverse and dynamic challenges of academia and industry^x.

Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

25. The UK believes that joint degrees have the potential to improve graduates' capabilities in languages and to provide students with supervised experience of study in a variety of European university systems and cultures. As the institutions involved should organise joint programmes, there is no need for a single blueprint for such qualifications. The UK supports the conclusions of the 2004 Stockholm Bologna Process^{xi} seminar calling for national legislation to allow for the award of joint degrees.

ⁱ These are the HE funding councils for England (HEFCE), Scotland (SHEFC) and Wales (HEFCW), Universities UK (UUK), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and the Standing Conference on Principals (SCOP). For more information on the UK HE Europe Unit see: <http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/>

ⁱⁱ Six UK universities in the three rounds of the EUA's Quality Culture Project, 16 UK universities in the EUA's Joint Masters Project and eight UK universities in the Doctoral Programmes Project. <http://www.eua.be/eua/en/projects.jsp>

ⁱⁱⁱ Helsinki seminar: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Old/030314-15Helsinki_Results.pdf

^{iv}: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/050113-14Copenhagen/050113-14_Recommendations.pdf

^v The UK ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in May 2003. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm>

^{vi} ENIC/NARIC: <http://www.enic-naric.net/>

^{vii} SCQF: <http://www.scf.org.uk/>

^{viii} For more information please see: <http://www.elwa.org.uk/elwaweb/elwa.aspx?pageid=1612.s>

^{ix} http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/050203-05Salzburg/050203-05_Conclusions.pdf

^x This is evidenced in the Research Careers Initiative, the activity and reforms that followed the Roberts' report, and the postgraduate research programmes section of the recent 'Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education' developed by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency.

^{xi} http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/040506Stockholm/040506-07_Recommendations.pdf